



## SEVEN ACROSS THE SAHARA

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TO

ADELA

Friend of many years  
in Africa, Arabia and Kent,  
who came to see us off



## POINTS OF VIEW

### *Feminine.*

And in that day seven women shall take hold of one man.

ISAIAH.

And this is a thing that hath not been since ever the world began, that a man should be led by six women in a chariot through that great wilderness.

ANON.

### *Masculine.*

He led his flock to the back side of the desert.

EXODUS.

### *Common.*

And they turned their faces, and said unto Micah, what aileth thee, that thou comest with such a company?

JUDGES.

# CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE . . . . .	xiii
CHAPTER	
I. I LOOK AT THE MAP OF AFRICA . . . . .	I
II. WE START FROM UPHOUSDEN AND REACH ALGIERS. . . . .	15
III. THE BUSY HUM OF THE TOWER'D CITY OF ALGIERS . . . . .	27
IV. THROUGH BARBARY TO THE SAHARA . . . . .	36
V. EL GOLEA. . . . .	51
VI. "BEAU GESTE" OASES . . . . .	60
VII. WE REACH THE LAND OF THE VEILED PEOPLE . . . . .	70
VIII. IN THE HEART OF THE HOGGAR . . . . .	79
IX. THE DIFFICULT PART OF THE JOURNEY. . . . .	87
X. HARD GOING TO THE BORJ OF IN GEZZAM . . . . .	94
XI. WE FINISH OUR CROSSING OF THE SAHARA . . . . .	101
XII. FROM THE WELL OF IN ABANGARIT TO AGADES AND THE END OF THE NOMAD LANDS . . . . .	110
XIII. WE TURN RIGHT AT ZINDER AND COME TO THE WELL OF RUNZI. . . . .	127
XIV. WE REACH THE NIGER . . . . .	136
XV. WAGADUGU AT LAST. . . . .	147
XVI. THE END OF THE DRIVE AT TAMALE . . . . .	153

# CONTENTS

XVII.	ON TO KUMASI.	. . . . .	161
XVIII.	TO ACCRA AND THE GULF OF GUINEA.	. . . . .	175
XIX.	<i>I LOOK AT THE MAP AGAIN: AND REFLECT ON THE</i>		
	PROBLEMS IT EVOKES	. . . . .	190
	APPENDIX I	. . . . .	215
	APPENDIX II	. . . . .	222

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

*(From photographs by author unless otherwise acknowledged)*

Between pages 60 and 61

THE KING OF ALL THE WORLD AND HIS COURT

*Photo: Mark Cave*

THE SUQ AT GHARDAIA

*Photo: Cliché Ofalac*

BENI ISGEN

TAMANRASSET

*Photo: Cliché Ofalac*

IN SUCH SHADE AS THE CAR COULD AFFORD

TUAREG AT IN ABANGARIT. THE END OF THE SAHARA

BY THE WELL OF RUNZI

GRANARIES LIKE GREAT WATER-POTS

THE ARCHITECTURE OF WA

THE CHIEF OF CHANA

THE CHIEF'S COMPOUND AND FAMILY

A VOLTA FISHING VILLAGE

ON THE SHORE OF THE GULF OF GUINEA

*Photo: Mark Cave*

## MAP

Pages x and xi





## PREFACE

A JOURNEY across the Sahara is no longer one of exploration nor indeed a remarkable achievement, and therefore does not in itself justify a book. It is, however, still something of an adventure, especially nowadays when the pre-war organization of the route for the benefit of travellers is so much curtailed. As a family undertaking it has much to commend it, and I hope I may succeed in conveying to my readers some of the interest and pleasure our family or "circus" of seven experienced, even if they do not wish to do likewise.

But it is not on these grounds alone that I seek to justify myself for having written this book. The part of Africa which we crossed is full of serious problems for us and our French allies, and I think that one of the main thoughts which are stimulated by such a journey is the necessity for much closer collaboration between us.

Then again there are a whole range of questions concerned with the economic, social and political development of the area, and the speed at which development can be pushed ahead, in the interests of the people themselves so that they can play a full part in their future, in the interests of the rest of the world to which they must make a growing contribution, so that they may, as we rightly hope, want to stay with us as willing partners when they take the reins into their own hands.

I do not presume to suggest solutions to any of these problems, but I have hopes that what I have written may encourage interest in them, for they concern us all closely, and may give some background of information on the countries through which we passed. I hope also that I may convey some of the admiration I feel for what our French colleagues have achieved, particularly in the Sahara. I should like to do this not only because of gratitude for all the kindness we were shown, but because I doubt if some of us sufficiently recognize what extraordinarily fine administrators the French have in these barren lands, or how devoted they are to the interests of their charges.

## PREFACE

Throughout the journey there lay on my knee the map of the particular part of the road we were following and a route book, in the compilation of which I had some part but which was for the most part made by my wife and Elizabeth Graham. It gave not only the estimated mileage from place to place and the difficulties and resources of the route, but also contained general information on the countries we were passing through, collected from a number of books. The book was so constructed that on one side it had the account of the things we expected to find while on the other I recorded things as we actually found them. The book soon contained more and more thoughts stimulated by the events and scenes of the journey, and this naturally tended to reflect comparisons with other countries and my own personal interest in nature and the ways of man, and more particularly perhaps a penchant for deserts and the dwellers therein. My wife, Elizabeth Graham and Margaret Peffers also kept diaries, and I am grateful to them for giving me a free run of them.

I would emphasize that the book is a completely informal and personal record. It does not pretend in the least to be a profound study. It is not intended for the expert, and he will find in it a certain naïveté, as though I wrote as a discoverer of unknown country. Personally that is what I was, and I have attempted to uncover the country for others who have not yet known it, and may never know it, but whose interest in it and sympathy for it I wish to arouse.

I have had comparatively little African experience. My personal contacts with Bantu Africa ended over twenty years ago. My contact with Sudanic Africa had barely begun when I finished the book. It owes nothing whatever to official knowledge gained in a country new to me, for I had not had time to gain any when I wrote it. It reflects of course the sympathies engendered and the conclusions reached in ten happy years of experience in South Arabia. There my wife and I wandered and worked over the then largely unexplored plateaux and valleys of the Hadhramaut and to some extent in the fastnesses of the Aden Hinterland and the Kingdom of the Yemen. There we helped the men of goodwill to make peace where for a millenium there had been war, and there we helped them to set up their own ordered government. There we learnt that any self-respecting race wants to manage its own affairs, and



## PREFACE

that it is unnatural, nay wrong, for one race to be dominated by another. We learnt too that the race which in some ways may have learnt more than another will, if it casts its bread upon the waters, receive it back in such measure that the bonds of friendship so forged will be stronger than any between a conquering nation and subject peoples.

Yet I would not say that it is only the Arabian field which has influenced me: I owe much to service in Zanzibar, in Mauritius, in Germany, as well as to short but intensive visits to Malaya, Java, India, the Sudan, Transjordan and other countries, and what I have said in the last chapter on the problems of Africa, economic, social and political, represents thoughts stimulated by the journey and conditioned largely by previous experience. Living amongst men and women of many different faiths has persuaded me how fundamentally religion is necessary as a background to life, and made me wonder whether, owing to the difficulties, we have not rather funked tackling the matter in our approach. I have, therefore, also included some reflections on religion, particularly in the last chapter.

"Think on these things" is the urgent request I make to the reader of this last chapter. It does not matter if I am right or wrong in the views I express on the problems that face Africa to-day. What does matter is that we should realize that they are urgent, tremendous, difficult, and need our serious and constant consideration, for their proper handling may largely affect the future of the human race. I write like this from a profound consciousness that delay—and there is far too much delay—in dealing with these things threatens disaster.

In one respect at least an apology may be due. For about the last ten or fifteen years I have read less and less about "African" Africa, and more and more about the Middle East and Europe. It may be therefore that I have said things which are already commonplace to others better informed. But perhaps if it has any value it is as a record of the reactions to new scenes of a newcomer with my background, who has no axe to grind beyond an intense wish to promote goodwill and unity among men of all races.

I am not sure whether I should not apologize for the number of quotations which appear in this book. There are several reasons for them. One is that I am an inveterate collector of "bits and pieces"

## PREFACE

of all kinds and having collected anything I find it extremely hard to discard it. A better reason is perhaps that having made a quite serious effort to reduce them, there were few I thought inappropriate and they seemed mostly to emphasize points I wished to make myself. All I hope is that their presence in such abundance will not seem pretentious.

Lastly I must make my acknowledgements. As usual I owe much to my wife who in the midst of many cares has yet found time to type and check and contribute. This time, however, the bulk of the typing—and the book has been typed rather more than three times—has been done by Elizabeth Graham, to whom also I am grateful for the map and its embellishments. I have also to thank Dr. Mark Cave (formerly of Yendi, Northern Territories, and now by a curious coincidence of Ash-next-Sandwich), and the *Office Algérien d'Action Economique et Touristique* for some of the best photographs.

I am very grateful to that most kindly, tolerant and enlightened of public institutions, the Colonial Office which made the journey possible. The first two epithets are justified on personal grounds when I think of what "They" have put up with from me in the last thirty years, but it should not be thought that I credit "Them" with enlightenment merely for those reasons. Help I have received from Sir Charles Jeffries, my oldest friend in the Colonial Office, has been of a personal nature. He has helped my thinking on various matters, some of them little connected with the work of the Office.

I am also grateful to the War Office which kindly provided me with the maps for our journey.

What I owe to the *Ministère de la France d'Outre Mer* and to colleagues in the French Colonial Service will I hope be evident from the book itself.

There is no danger of my forgetting my debt to John Grey Murray, my tutor in book-building. He has almost guided my pen and if the book is readable it is due in large part to him.

W. H. I.

Uphousden,  
March, 1949.

## Chapter I

### I LOOK AT THE MAP OF AFRICA

*I am told there are people who do not care for maps, and find it hard to believe. . . . Here is an inexhaustible fund of interest for any man with eyes to see or twopence-worth of imagination to understand with.*

R. L. STEVENSON.

*Thy people shall be my people.*

RUTH.

*Where are the sons of Saba in the south,  
The men of mirth and pride to whom my songs were sung,  
The kinsmen of her soul who is my soul,  
The brethren of her beauty whom I love?*

WILFRID BLUNT (*From the Arabic*).

*I think of all the many and diverse tracks which, once landed at Calais, if only you keep going eastward, will take you to Moscow or Tobolok, westward to Lisbon or Madrid, and southward to Rome. What is more intellectually exhilarating to the mind, and even to the senses, than to stand looking down the vista of some great road in France or Italy, or up a long and well-worn horse track in Asia or Africa, a path which has not yet been trod by the foot or the wheel of the gazing wayfarer, or by the hoof of his horse, and to wonder through what strange places, by what towns and castles, by what rivers and streams, by what mountains and valleys it will take him ere he reaches his destination?*

THE SPECTATOR.

*The use of travelling is to regulate imagination by reality, and instead of thinking how things may be, to see them as they are.*

SAMUEL JOHNSON.

I SUPPOSE it is not wise to feel too much part of another country if you wish to avoid heart-burnings, but I have never been able to rid myself of the idea that being concerned with a country's government makes you inevitably part and parcel of that country. Twenty-seven years is a long time; and, when you have lived happily and intimately in a quarter of the world where so many scenes are familiar to you, a realization that your time in it is finished makes it feel as

## I LOOK AT THE MAP OF AFRICA

if it had gone in a day. Yesterday one was twenty-two, to-day one is forty-nine. One starts again.

The Colonial Office, in matters of transfers and promotions works rather like Aladdin's Jinn. You are given a ring and if you but rub it you may find yourself whisked from one corner of the world to somewhere entirely different. The trouble is that, nowadays, the Jinn is not nearly so well under control as in Aladdin's day, even though it mendaciously signs itself your obedient servant. It does not appear at once, at least not often, and when it does it will more often than not propose to take you to somewhere quite other than where you want to go. So if you put yourself in its power you will inevitably feel unsettled unless you quite definitely don't mind where and when it is going to carry you off.

When I got back from Germany in August, 1946, I heard that there were two possible new destinations for me, either another part of Arabia or the Gold Coast. In 1919 when I was on the threshold of my career overseas there had been talk of my going either to Nigeria or the Gold Coast. I was told that Sir Hugh Clifford, then Governor of the Gold Coast and at home on leave in England, had been asked if I should be suitable for service there in view of my lameness due to a war wound. He had said that it would be quite all right if I could ride a bicycle! I was able to assure the powers-that-be that I could, and having with reading well imagined myself in West Africa, I was, much to my surprise, appointed to Zanzibar.

Now I was back at the beginning, and in all ways I felt that twenty-seven years had gone in a flash. They had all been spent on the shores of the Indian Ocean, and for the last ten Doreen and I had so identified ourselves with the Hadhramaut and its people that we felt that their country was our country, and their people our people.

It was not until the end of October that telephone calls from Sir Alan Burns, then Governor of the Gold Coast, and Sir George Gater, then Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, told me that my appointment as Chief Commissioner of the Northern Territories Protectorate was agreed. I heard it with relief but with no elation. It was as though I had been looking for a long time at two pictures, both dim and rather out of focus. One was an oasis in the desert, a white minaret, tall mud-built houses and palms. Distantly one

## AN ARMCHAIR JOURNEY

heard the sound accompaniment, the *muedhin's* call to prayer. The other was of a little village of thatched mud-huts set on red earth in a great expanse of bush. The accompaniment was of throbbing, far-off drums. Of a sudden the light flicked off the former picture and the focus of the second grew clearer, the throbbing of the drums, louder, more insistent.

It was a few days before the second picture seemed at all real and I was not very happy about it. The prospect aroused my administrative instincts, my strong feelings on the partnership of races, my active interest in hastening the time when all humanity should be tied together in a common fellowship. But it did not evoke the same personal emotions as would have done a move amongst people whose language and culture I already understood. How could it? It lacked the same background of a human relationship already achieved, the fond familiarity of surroundings which had become a second home country. At fifty you cannot suddenly swap all your friends and relations and one home environment for another as easily as you put on a new suit of clothes.

Although I wasn't feeling as enthusiastic as I should have wished, I knew I could get pleasure from the contemplation of a map. It is a most enjoyable way of spending an hour or so even if the journey contemplated is only an armchair one. So Milton, perhaps the most imaginative of armchair travellers, thus surveyed the world:

"It was a hill,  
Of Paradise the highest, from whose top  
The hemisphere of Earth in clearest ken  
Stretched out to the amplest reach of prospect lay. . . .  
His eye might there command wherever stood  
City of old or modern fame, the seat  
Of mightiest empire, from the destined walls  
Of Cambalu, seat of Cathaian Can,  
And Samarchand by Oxus, Temir's throne,  
To Paquin, of Sinaean kings, and thence  
To Agra and Lahor of Great Mogul,  
Down to the golden Chersonese, or where  
The Persian in Ecbatan sat, or since

## I LOOK AT THE MAP OF AFRICA

In Hispahan, or where the Russian Ksar  
In Mosco, or the Sultan in Bizance,  
Turchestan-born; nor could his eye not ken  
The empire of Negus to his utmost port  
Ercoco, and the less marine kings,  
Mombaza, and Quiloa, and Melind,  
And Sofala (thought Ophir), to the realm  
Of Congo, and Angola farthest south,  
Or thence from Niger flood to Atlas mount,  
The kingdoms of Almansor, Fez and Sus,  
Marocco, and Algiers, and Tremisen;  
On Europe thence, and where Rome was to sway  
The world: in spirit perhaps he also saw  
Rich Mexico, the seat of Montezume,  
And Cusco in Peru, the richer seat  
Of Atabalipa, and yet unspoiled  
Guiana, whose great city Geryon's sons  
Call El Dorado."

I won't suggest I did not know just where the Gold Coast was on the map, even though I had never heard of Tamale, the capital of the Northern Territories. But the occasion did demand looking at a map with new eyes, looking at the Gold Coast as a concrete fact in my future. The nearest thing to hand was the children's school atlas. I opened it, and there were the four little red patches set in mauve which represented the British West African Dependencies, increasing in size from Gambia on the left to Nigeria on the right. Third from the left and second largest was the Gold Coast. Tamale was not even shown. My eyes wandered round the map conjuring up thoughts of past scenes. Off on the right, a bit of Arabia. Better not dwell on that too closely. Familiar Zanzibar and Pemba. Kenya, into which I had wandered a little. South Africa of which I had seen a bit. How many years ago? Nineteen-nineteen it was; the first time I had set foot on African soil. A tiny dot out in the Indian Ocean for Mauritius. Seven lean years' wait, but happy memories of old friends. Bourbon, Madagascar, Lourenço Marques. All of them called up photographs out of the past. Egypt, the Sudan, brought up more

## MEMORIES OF AFRICA

recent pictures and much the same feelings as Arabia. British Somaliland, to which I had once belonged officially, but never set foot in till my brief technical association with it had long passed. The might-have-been of Ethiopia, in which too I had a deep and friendly interest.

No, it was the other unknown side of Africa with which I was now concerned. All that mauve was French territory. What an enormous continuous slice of Africa it was. In the east they had only tiny Jibuti which I knew quite well, and of course Madagascar which was not really Africa. But here French West Africa, French Equatorial Africa. These red patches were just enclaves in a vast French territory. I had rather thought of them as a unity of British West Africa, just as I thought of British East Africa, but of course they were not even contiguous and their situation was quite different, for in East Africa the only foreign influence was now British. This French territory stretched right up to the top of Africa—Morocco. We knew Tangiers. Once Doreen and I had planned to travel in Morocco and had booked from Aden to Tangiers, but had had to give it up the night of our arrival there as we had both been smitten with malaria. Algeria and Tunisia. Twice a brief glimpse of Algiers from the sea. The Sahara, all that was Arab, Muslim country, below it the Bilad-es-Sudan, the Land of the Blacks, the gradual fading out of Islam into animism with the fading of the desert into the bush. A realization came to me that it was not so much the red and mauve which were important, at least not primarily important. This was all one sub-continent sheltering a diversity of races other than European. The boundaries were not these lines artificially drawn on the map.

The huge area bounded on the north by the Mediterranean, on the west and south by the Atlantic and the east by Libya, the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, the Belgian Congo and Portuguese West Africa, covered 3,700,000 square miles. Politically all but a fifth was French. It had a total population of over 66,000,000, and a good deal more than half of them were politically French. In the Sudanic region, despite the fact that less than 500,000 square miles are British, the population of the British dependencies was about 7,000,000 more than the combined populations of French West and Equatorial Africa, each occupying more than five times as much area. In particular

## I LOOK AT THE MAP OF AFRICA

Nigeria alone, with its 20,000,000 souls, had a greater population than both the French dependencies together which numbered only 18,500,000.

I felt that these blue book facts were apt to overshadow the fact that the population was not so much French or British but African, and that the separation of the northern part from the southern by the Sahara was really more important than the tints of either. It divided this area roughly into an Arabic speaking area and an area in which a multitude of different languages, generally loosely termed Sudanic, were spoken. The Sahara divided the area into a predominantly brown area and an almost entirely black area. It did not divide it into an entirely Muslim area and an entirely Pagan area, but despite the number of Muslims in the southern part the politics of the northern area were more likely to be influenced by Muslim trends than the south.

I reflected how much more interesting and useful it would be to approach Tamale by the back door, to see all the changes of climate, country and race, and to appreciate to what extent they depended on each other, than to go to the Gold Coast by sea. It was a common task of British and French to help these people to a common goal. It seemed impossible in these days that there could be two goals. The paths might be different, but Africa was no longer a prey over which the powers could scramble for bits, even though these artificial lines remained to remind one of their past rivalries. Africa was emergent, it was beginning to have thoughts of its own more evident than anything it had had in its past. The days of colonization by force, exploitation and the imposition of an alien civilization by those who "knew what was best for the native" were over. Even the much more noble conception of trusteeship was coming to an end, and the much fuller relationship of partnership was beginning. Such a journey would enable me to make personal contacts with allied colleagues engaged on the same task as ours. I felt this was very important as it was inevitable that co-operation must increase in the interests of all three partners, and perhaps of civilization itself. If we studied common problems together on the spot, the men in the field, common results might more hopefully be expected at the top on the London-Paris level. Any two sets of workers on a common problem, except in science, working separately are almost



## INFLUENCE OF THE SAHARA

certain to produce different answers, and administration is not a science but an art.

I saw that nature had conveniently laid out the western bulge of Africa with a horizontal series of zones, so that a journey from north to south would give a cross-section of them. First of all there was the Tell, a narrow strip of undulating country along the Mediterranean which differed little in climate from Southern Europe, and was inhabited by a rural peasant folk. Then there was a belt of mountains, mostly dry and plateau like, but with the green peaks of the Atlas dominating them. These two zones formed what was generally known as Barbary. Then came what was to me the most interesting zone of all, as well as the widest. The Sahara, an Arabic word simply meaning desert, was, *par excellence*, the desert. It was the largest in the world, though possibly not the driest. I doubted if it was as dry as the great desert of south Arabia, the Rub 'al Khali, the Empty Quarter. South of the Sahara were successive zones of steppes, savannah, parklands, called collectively Bilad es Sudan, and forest. Then the sea, the coasts of Guinea called Grain, Ivory, Gold and Slave.

I remembered that empty as the Sahara comparatively was, it had profoundly influenced the history of the populated zones to its north and south. The highest things in civilization had always come from the desert and in particular all that there was of culture in the Sudan, until Europe stepped in, had come to it from the Sahara. The extent of its civilizing influence had not been as great as that which the nomads of other deserts had brought to the world around them, because the Sahara was so vast and so dry that it had never acted as a human reservoir from which hordes overflowed to the same extent. So the climate of the Sahara was extremely important. If it got drier its people would move north and south and the desert would spread into the savannah and parklands. On the whole, the evidence at present was that the Sahara was encroaching on the Sudan.

Thinking about the Sahara, there came sneaking in a little tempting voice. "Yes, and that would give you a chance of seeing another part of the Arab world, and of hearing Arabic again." As for the practical side of it, all I knew was that there were routes across the Sahara, and once in French West Africa I presumed there were roads

## I LOOK AT THE MAP OF AFRICA

of a sort almost everywhere on which cars could go. The Governor had told me I would need a car, a station wagon to tour in. Why not use it to transport ourselves across this vast territory? It would be an easy way of getting our 'circus' there.

For we were now seven. In 1937, when Doreen and I were in the Hadhramaut we had adopted Zahra. Her mother, a freeborn beduin of the great Sei'ar tribe of the stock of Kinda whence came kings and famous men such as the poet Imru'l Qais, had been wrongly enslaved and had become a *casus belli* between two tribes. Her adventures had no doubt developed the vagabond in her and she had wanted to be free of the incubus of a starving child. When Zahra came to us on the 29th of May, she looked no more than a year old. We gave her the date as a first birthday and brought her back to life on Glaxo and cod liver oil. However, later, the doctor in Aden declared that judging by her teeth she must be more and we therefore made her two. This saddled her perhaps with six months or so more than she owed, an addition which makes very little difference in Arabia but means more in a country where life for the young is largely regulated by birth certificates and exams. She saw England for the first time in 1944 and was now at a day school in Kensington.

Then there was Leila, now going to school with Zahra and also a new arrival in England for she had been born in Cairo on the 16th of June, 1940. Thither Doreen had gone with Zahra from the Hadhramaut on the eve of the Italian entry into the war and there, with the help of an Egyptian Jewish lady doctor, she had produced her in the midst of a Hadhrami family settled in Egypt. So though English (and Scots, Irish and Dutch) by race, Leila too by birth and early years had claims on the orient.

Next came Rahima. She had been with us five years now and had never been out of Aden till she came with us to Mukalla in 1942. Doreen had known her and her sisters since 1935, but as she was strictly in purdah I never saw her till she came to spend a week-end with us in Aden for health reasons. That week-end has not yet come to an end and Rahima has shared all the fortunes of the family, working for famine victims and children in Mukalla, coming to wartime England, helping with house-work and standing in queues.

## INTRODUCING THE 'CIRCUS'

Strange for her, after twenty-eight years in purdah, to fight for fish in London! Rahima is of Persian descent; her grandfather came to Mocha as a trader, and when the development of Aden killed the famous port, he moved to Aden, where his son, Rahima's father, joined the Government service, became an Assistant to the Resident and helped in negotiating many of the treaties with the tribes of the Aden Hinterland. Several of her relations have been trusted servants of the Empire, wise in counsel and decorated for their services, and in Mukalla she too had won an honour for her services.

And now there were Elizabeth and Margaret. Elizabeth, late Junior Commander A.T.S., had learnt my ways in Germany, and had the knack of recording my statements at Quadripartite meetings and elsewhere in the words which I knew very well I had not expressed coherently, but which were just what I wished I had said. As she was never seriously appalled at overwork, and knew the worst, I was glad when she wanted to go abroad again; Arabia or Africa was much the same to her. Her practical commonsense outlook, her efficiency and independent spirit, the products of Scotland and Derbyshire and a North Country upbringing in a very medical family, reinforced by education as a boarder at Malvern, made her a tower of strength and only partially masked the essential femininity which made her a good companion with a strong sense of humour. This last, perhaps, at least partly accounted for her being in the circus at all.

Margaret was the youngest of the grown-ups. She had all the enthusiasms and intensity which make the young attractive. A soldier's daughter, she had a sturdy courage, native to the lochs and glens of Angus, softened by an imagination and love of poetry, which, with a deep-rooted attachment to the Catholic faith, were perhaps the legacy of an Italian grandmother. With her, although born in 'Iraq, Scotland stood first. Her heart was divided between Angus and St. Andrews, where she had graduated with honours, but in the tradition of her Scots race she wanted also to spread her wings and see the world. She had come to teach Zahra and Leila.

Doreen and I completed the troupe. Of myself quite enough has been said or will transpire. I have never ceased to wonder how it was that Doreen with a background of London, politics and the

stage, shaken to the core if she met a cow in a country lane, became an Arab adept, equally at home in a harim or a beduin encampment, travelling long journeys by camel with only one or two beduin companions and the lightest of equipment. Of her stage life, Michael MacLiammoir wrote in *All for Hecuba*, "Then there was Doreen, a slim blonde creature whose father had been Secretary for Ireland (later Home Secretary and as Film Censor, the man with the best known signature in Britain) and who was a charming Ophelia". . . . There he saw her, "with her slim and heedless grace, endless gaiety, and her crowd of friends to say good-bye." Thus, too, I saw her in 1934, perched high on a camel, screw her monocle into her eye the better to observe an irate beduin stuffing a round into his rifle to shoot her as an intruding Christian, and, with a peal of laughter, make the silly fellow drop his gun in sheer astonishment. Sir Cosmo Parkinson, in *The Colonial Office from Within*, says that though she has not held an official appointment, the Colonial Administrative Service can almost claim her as its own. "Her work, especially among the women and children, has been outstanding and great is the fame of 'Doreen,' as she is called by the Arabs in those parts. She has travelled all through the Hadhramaut, often quite alone, conversing fluently with the Arabs in their own language and admitted as a welcome guest in their homes, learning, advising, helping all the time." I remember how once travelling up a wadi which was on the route of a journey she had made shortly before, I remarked on the fact that contrary to custom there were not the usual crop of tribal troubles brought up for discussion. "Oh, Doreen settled all those," was the reply.

Whether it was the Irish or the Scots or the Dutch in her I do not know, but I may be forgiven for believing that there was not much she could not do if she turned her hand to it. Just at the moment she was combining housekeeping with work at the B.B.C. and launching out into the unexplored field of wartime cookery with "Mrs. Beeton" propped on the dresser as an unsatisfactory tutor. It would have done that lady a world of good to be taken round the Hadhramaut in her flounces and furbelows by Doreen and taught something of how real people cook.

Elizabeth had come down from her native Derbyshire that day

“LET’S GO OVERLAND TO THE GOLD COAST”

and the whole family was in the kitchen chattering while Zahra and Leila supped. I walked in, spectacles on nose and atlas in hand.

“I say, what about motoring overland to the Gold Coast?”

“Oh, yes, let’s,” in a chorus from Zahra and Leila.

“Wouldn’t it be marvellous,” from Dorcen, turning round, saucepan in hand, the ‘small bag of rice and dried fish, two beduins and a camel’ look in her eyes.

Rahima was ironing in a corner. “We can talk Arabic,” she said. “Look at him, he wants to see Arabs again.”

Travel on any large scale was a great adventure to Margaret. She was only just beginning to enlarge her horizon beyond Europe, of which she had largely thought when seeking to go abroad, so a trip across the Sahara was a Very Big Adventure indeed.

“Gosh, how wonderful,” was her contribution, rather bewildered but ready to take anything on trust.

“I can drive,” said Elizabeth practically. “I’ve driven in snow drifts and perhaps sand is much the same. But is there a real road, and what do you know about it?”

“Nothing,” said I, “but I shall to-morrow.”

\* \* \*

The journey really began next day with a walk along leafy Harington Gardens and a 96 bus from South Kensington to Piccadilly Circus to look for Fanum House. I headed into the A.A. building for the first time and looked around for a likely corner to enquire.

My eye lighted on a board on a distant counter reading FOREIGN TOURING DEPARTMENT. I made my wants known to a helpful young man behind the counter.

“Oh yes,” he said, and feeling under the counter produced me a roneoed pamphlet. “That gives you all the details about the journey. Then there is also our book, *African Throughways*. If you’ll fill up these forms we can get you all the necessary documents. Would you like to see our engineer about the car now?”

This left me breathless. “I think I’ll read all this first and then I’ll be back. Thank you very much. Good morning.”

I walked out. “I’d no idea it was so easy,” I said to myself. How wrong I was.

\* \* \*

A number nine bus took me to Kensington Gore to seek the unfailing help of the Royal Geographical Society. There I found maps showing the motor roads from Algiers to Tamale, and books of motorists' experiences across the Sahara.

It still sounded easy and I walked back home through the wide quiet avenues of South Kensington, which are always pleasant to me as giving one not only space to breathe but many a reminder of far away places. There are Kensington Gardens with their history and their rusticity, the Speke memorial, Watts' Physical Energy recalling its South African twin with its view over wide spaces, Peter Pan, the imperial significance of the Albert Memorial with its camels and Arabs and elephants made me fond even of that, and there often seemed something allied to the open in the music in the Albert Hall. The monument to Napier of Magdala, the Imperial Institute and the Natural History Museum, the Iraqi Legation and many others held many a memory of bright, coloured lands, and so I always found a walk through these scenes a suitable environment in which to plan such a journey as ours. It seemed as good as done when I got home.

It appeared from my morning's enquiries that we should have to approach the Sudan over what is called the Hoggar route. This does not coincide exactly with any of the great caravan routes of the past; desert motor tracks rarely do. Cars can carry their own water and depend on speed. For economic travel they need long stretches of level plateau and hard sand, where water is usually scarce. This does not suit slow moving camels which require water at reasonable intervals. Permanent water means centres of population, so a desert car route rarely passes as many settlements as a caravan route. The caravan route most nearly corresponding with the one we should follow was that from Fez to In Salah, and thence by In Azawa in the Hoggar to Agades or In Gall. This led to Zinder and Kano, but a western route led to Timbuktu. This was the first stretch of the great Pilgrim route from Timbuktu which from In Azawa led by Murzuk, Augila and Siwa to Cairo.

All the vast area through which we should have to pass is divided into various political units; the French ones of Algeria and two colonies of French West Africa, the Niger and the Ivory Coast, and

the British Gold Coast, two colonies, the Gold Coast Colony and Ashanti, and a Protectorate known rather vaguely as the Northern Territories. It would be more descriptively named if it were called the Volta Protectorate, for much of the Red, White and Black Volta rivers pass through it.

From the Colonial Office I found as usual immediate sympathy, and an old friend who had long influenced its destinies wrote: "many will envy you your unconventional but characteristic method of approach to the Northern Territories." There followed a characteristic warning against getting lost in the Sahara and needing search parties to be sent out for us, which he felt would not be a popular beginning. No one shared this feeling more strongly than I did, and I was determined to do all that lay in my power to avoid it. The first requisite was the car, and its almost immediate delivery so that our departure would not be delayed and so that we could learn something about it before we started. The Crown Agents for the Colonies gave ready help with this, and it was promised for the 24th of January.

Wandering into the maze of Shell-Mex House, and asking about supplies of petrol in the Sahara, nearly landed me with a lot of statistics from the Ministry of Supply, installed like a fledgling cuckoo in the nest of Shell. Eventually, by a snake and ladder course up and down lifts and through long passages, I found a most knowledgeable person who put me wise on many matters of Saharan travel. Martin put the matter in its proper perspective, in which I saw some difficulties but at the same time realized the practicability of our journey. His help and advice showed me what to do to overcome difficulties I had not foreseen. The great thing was that Shell promised to provide us petrol at In Gezzam. Petrol was easy all through France and in Northern Algeria. It was available for travellers through the organization of S.A.T.T. (Société Africaine des Transports Tropicaux) at Ghardaia, El Golea, In Salah, Arak and Tamanrasset. From Tamanrasset to Zinder, a distance of 850 miles, there was none. In Gezzam lay 252 miles south of Tamanrasset, and Shell also asked for petrol for us at Agades, 303 miles beyond In Gezzam, and 295 from Zinder. To be on the safe side we could not expect to do more than ten miles to the gallon with the 30 h.p. Ford V-8 WOA2 we were to have,

## I LOOK AT THE MAP OF AFRICA

and to allow a safe margin for heavy work in the sand Martin advised us to have a petrol capacity of forty gallons.

Since the war the old system of breakdown contracts for independent travellers had not been renewed, and the only insurance available was to travel a few days before a S.A.T.T. bus, so that if you did break down irretrievably you could abandon the car but be sure of the rescue of the passengers. The only south-bound bus leaving Algiers in March was on the 7th, so that finally determined the date of our departure.

With the kindly help of the French Line and the *Ministère de la France d'Outre Mer*, we got passages by the *Ville d'Oran* from Marseilles to Algiers on the 22nd of February. Passages by the limited accommodation available over the Channel were booked up weeks ahead, but we asked the A.A. early enough to get booked by the *Invicta* on February the 17th. This completed the last link necessary and took quite a bit of organization.

But I had no idea how complicated a business it would prove to make all the other arrangements. By the time we had finished I thought the journey itself would be child's play, compared with the task of getting over all the hurdles there were before the course itself began. We were now in a new home in Kent. Many journeys to London and telephone calls were necessary, and the correspondence resulted in Elizabeth having a collection of files which would have been a respectable nucleus for any new Government department. Almost every permit or what-not we had to obtain took visits, calls and letters. In the course of contact with many departments we found much help and willingness to meet our needs and infallible courtesy, but goodness me, can we remain a great nation if the difficulties of present day supplies do not speedily allow us to remove controls? It is fortunate that the great enterprises British men and women have achieved in the past were accomplished in more spacious times; they could not be done to-day.

It would be wearisome to record in detail all that we had to do, but for the sake of those who want to follow the same way I have included some information in the Appendices. All I will stress here is that preparations will take weeks, if not months, to complete.



*Chapter II*  
WE START FROM UPHOUSDEN AND  
REACH ALGIERS

*Kent in the commentaries of Cæsar writ,  
Is termed the civillest place of all this isle.*

SHAKESPEARE.

*Then longen folk to go on pilgrimages,  
And palmers for to seaken strange strands,  
To distant shroues renowned in sundry lands;  
And specially, from every shires end  
Of England, they to Canterbury wend.*

CHAUCER.

*When any great design thou dost intend,  
Think on the means, the manner, and the end.*

SIR. J. DENHAM.

IN mid-November we left London for a new and permanent home in Kent, the first we had ever had. We found Uphousden in the first place through an advertisement describing it as a genuine fifteenth century Tudor manor, plainly in the depths of the country. Taking a bus from Sandwich we came through Ash with its ancient church to a village called Westmarsh, three miles to the north. From the bus stop a quarter of an hour's walk brought us to Uphousden, whose nearest neighbour was another old manor house some hundreds of yards away.

It was on slightly rising ground, whence its name which comes from the Anglo-Saxon *Up* and *Husūn*, houses. It is no doubt the sole survivor of the hamlet of which it was the manor house, the little houses round about having long since disappeared. There was something attractive and Arab about this conception because it is just so that hamlets in the tribal parts of Arabia stand. In the centre is the *Husn* (plural *Husūn*) or manor house, and clustered round it are the smaller *biyut*, houses or habitations. It is curious that the

Anglo-Saxon plural *Husum* should resemble so closely the Arabic plural *Husm*.

From the windows you could see in the distance the high cliffs of Ramsgate, and knew that by it was Pegwell Bay, the spot at which Julius Cæsar and, later, St. Augustine, landed. They came to England as we now go to Africa and Asia and brought the civilization of Rome and the Christian faith to these lands. We were then in much the same state as those to whom for the last hundred years or so we have taken the civilization we have built on our own institutions and what they and others brought us. The *Invasion of Britain*, when I re-read it in Zanzibar with a small boy, seemed to me very much like a book which any colonial pioneer in Africa in the nineteenth century might have written. But alas, we, when we go to Africa, are not in the same position as St. Augustine. He came to our shores teaching one version of a new faith, we go to Africa preaching at least twenty versions. It was right, and indeed inevitable, that having taken the faith St. Augustine preached our environment should mould it to our circumstances, and Africa will surely mould Christianity too to its own surroundings in the same way. But it is bound to suffer from being preached in so many different forms.

I grew to love Canterbury Cathedral before ever we went to live at Uphousden, and it was there I went to feel thankful when I had become a man of Kent. I was in origin a Kentish man from the parts about the weald, and I suppose my forbears, part and parcel of the soil of Kent and unlikely to have been immigrants to it, may have originally come with those hordes of Hengist and Horsa, for the name exists in Low German and in Scandinavian, meaning in one case the ram in the meadows and in the other the son of the raven. Oddly enough I was once known in the Hadhramaut as *Bin Jāmus*, the son of the water buffalo. This was a Hadhrami surname, and *Bin Ghurab*, or son of the raven, is another.

I went to the Cathedral again on the eve of our setting forth and I wished that Canterbury might be even more the Mother Church of the Empire than she is. It is well enough for the great of the Empire to lie in St. Paul's or Westminster Abbey in the capital of the Empire. London is known to almost any little boy or girl in a village school in Africa or elsewhere, but Canterbury and St. Augustine

## MIDST SNOW AND ICE

hardly at all. And yet London is a conception so vast that, as I know well from the experience of Rahima and others, it confounds those who hear it described. Canterbury, standing in the soft Kentish countryside, could I believe be much more easily understood and loved by the people of the villages. The Empire, let it be realized, is an Empire of little towns and villages much more than of great cities.

The 24th of January, the crucial date for the delivery of the car, rapidly drew near. We needed it badly for our preparations. Uphousden was in any case isolated, and it was right out of the world in the snowy wintry days of January and February, 1947. It is a house that breathes an air of a tougher age, for some at least of it was standing in 1484, and many of its oaken timbers had sailed the seas before that. We felt you had to be tough to live in it through those winter months. In September when we had first seen it, it was redolent of summer and breathed a mellow, happy air of the past with features, such as smoke windows and a window for the ladies above in the solar to watch the men feeding below in the hall, which pleasantly recalled Arab customs of to-day. But the soft colours of the house and its old-fashioned flowers set in green lawns were a welcome refreshment to eyes which had scanned far brown and burnt horizons for oases. Now, however, one could well have done with a spell of the brown and burnt horizons.

We have often grumbled at the heat when preparing journeys in other places, but preparations in the cold of that winter beat everything and it was very difficult to get about. We were therefore very dismayed when we learnt about the 22nd that owing to the extreme cold and the strikes delivery of the car would be postponed ten days. We made, and so did the body builders, valiant efforts to shorten this time, but we did not get the car until the 5th of February—barely time to run it in and for Doreen and Elizabeth to get some instruction on it at the Ford Agent's garage in Canterbury. They spent a hectic week or so with lessons, trying to learn what their instructor said would ordinarily take six months. Luckily at the last moment the date for our crossing the Channel was changed to the 18th as the *Invicta* had broken down, and we were transferred to the *Canterbury*.

## WE START FROM UPHOUSDEN AND REACH ALGIERS

So much of our lives has been packing up for journeys that that in itself was nothing new, but I cannot remember in all our departures one on which we started in such a state of complete exhaustion. There is always a last minute rush, whether you are setting out in a taxi to catch a boat train or whether you are packing up for a long camel journey, but this seemed to be a combination of everything—besides, we had only received our belongings from Aden four days before we set off.

We unpacked a hundred and twenty odd-cases on a frozen, snow-covered lawn; we stored their contents away in the house; we sorted out tropical clothes from our Aden luggage to take with us, or repacked them to be sent by sea. I don't know of any more revolting occupation than handling white or drill suits in the snow. The house had to be left in some sort of order as it was to be let.

Food, and other supplies for the journey, kept arriving or had to be fetched in the car even on the afternoon before our departure, when it looked as if we could not possibly be ready in time. I don't think I have ever seen such chaos and confusion in my life. While the rest of us tried to keep things under at least modified control, Rahima tirelessly got our scratch meals together and coped with a temperamental boiler, an erratic stove and a battery of lamps. She was generally bathed in paraffin and coaxed her charges with endearment in Arabic, patting and petting the stove if it showed signs of response, or head in boiler, cursing it with "*jinni shillak—may a jinn carry you off,*" when it would not work.

Margaret, held up by the snows in Scotland, only got back four days before we left. For her perhaps it was the biggest adventure of all for she had never been far beyond Scotland, and she will never forget the last few days she spent in her own country before setting out to see the world—for better or for worse. Glenisla, she said, had never been more beautiful. The hills were thick with snow and every tree was sparkling white. She had trudged seven weary miles through mountainous drifts to reach the outer world from her snow-bound fairyland, and aching and sore and very tired Elizabeth collected her from Ash and brought her back to Uphousden.

Short, with brown hair curling at the ends just above her shoulders, and very rosy cheeks, Margaret was very quiet and did not say

## A TIGHT FIT IN THE CAR

much, but she took a great deal in. The fears she later expressed of what she took for rascally types, and sometimes an air of patient martyrdom, accompanied at moments of stress by moans of "Oh, gosh," concealed an inner toughness of spirit which later carried her, sick and in pain, through uncomfortable days in the desert—a toughness she herself denied, saying she was too busy dreaming ever to accomplish anything.

On the morning of our leaving we were up early after a few hours' exhausted sleep, and after a hasty breakfast began the business of stuffing things into the car. Doreen, Elizabeth and I had loaded up the roof the night before, with frozen fingers and in a bitter wind for with the roof loaded the car could not stay in the garage. There was a huge pile of things in the dining-room to be stowed in, and other last-minute thoughts all over the house. By the time everything had been transferred to the car it was extremely difficult to see how we could insinuate ourselves.

Seeing that car now, people wonder how on earth seven of us crowded into it for a four thousand mile drive.

Of course size helped us a good deal for in a car it is beam which counts, and luckily all except myself had claims to slinness. Still it was not easy for I am fairly large myself, Doreen is tall and Elizabeth of medium height. Margaret is short and Rahima tiny. In size there is now little difference between Zahra and Leila. Although there are five years between them Leila is fast catching up on Zahra, who has the small bones and slender build of her race. What a contrast they make, Zahra with her warm brown skin, dark eyes and mop of soft fuzzy black hair, and Leila as fair as she well could be, though freckled, with hazel eyes and long straight silky flax half way down her back.

Perhaps it was not so much the number of the passengers, but the composition of the circus which was unusual. Taken one by one we were ordinary people enough, but as a whole we could not well have been more varied in race, religion and temperament. Considering the rather haphazard way in which most of us had come together the remarkable thing is not so much that we finished the journey together, but that we ever began it.

But there we were, short and tall, dark and fair, packed in at last.

## WE START FROM UPHOUSDEN AND REACH ALGIERS

We were wrapped in thick winter clothes and blankets, and wedged in with lamps, buckets, tins of oil and a great miscellany of loose bits and pieces which would be no use at all to us until we were in Africa. Crowded as we were we had reduced our kit to a minimum. The car's equipment was given first priority, and we had only one kettle, one saucepan, one frying pan and two blankets each. We had no beds, but we had to provide clothing for arctic and tropical conditions. It was a quarter to nine on the morning of the 18th of February 1947 when we turned out of the gate of Uphousden to start to Dover, the first and shortest stage of our journey. The speedometer showed five hundred and ninety-five miles, and the route book which Elizabeth and Doreen had taken such time and care in compiling came into use. I reflected that the speedometer would have to turn to four thousand before we had finished our drive. It was bitterly cold, freezing hard and snow still lay deep on the Kentish fields.

We passed through familiar Ash and I thought of its knights of old lying in the church. I thought of the crusaders too who so long ago had had to make their preparations in their Kentish homes for their journey to Arab lands. I wondered whether the crusades would ever have worked at all if all the controls we had had to pass and the permits we had had to get existed then. As we entered Dover we passed a signpost pointing to the Maison Dieu. That was once an enterprise designed to help adventurous spirits—a better conception than making them fill in forms. Here of old the Knight Templars and Hospitallers lodged when coming in and going out of the kingdom.

At the Dover Customs the speedometer registered the first seventeen miles of a journey we estimated at 3,630. We had been lucky because only a few days before Kent roads had been practically blocked with snow and England still lay, and was to lie for many weeks, icebound and snowbound. Each succeeding weather report had given no hope of a let-up, and we had recently heard of deep snows right across France, and even of snowstorms in Algeria. Most of the family were too tired to be excited. They stood around in icy draughts while Elizabeth and I coped with the A.A. and the Customs, who were kindness itself, and there was no unnecessary

delay in our getting aboard the *Canterbury* which we found extremely crowded. The Golden Arrow had come in and the ship was filled with passengers for the Continent.

At Calais an A.A. man took us in charge as we landed, and after we had got passports stamped and petrol coupons he left us in a large and empty waiting-room until the ship was empty and the train passengers had disappeared. Margaret was rather shaken at her first introduction to French manners and customs in an extremely mixed Ladies and Gentlemen, to which most of the family had migrated *en masse*. They returned to find Elizabeth and me standing by the car. We had had our hearts in our mouths as we saw it lifted high in the air and deposited, loads and all, on the quay, which was almost deserted as we packed in again and drove off for our crossing of France.

We lost the way out of Calais trying to find a Shell petrol pump, but in little more than half an hour were headed south for Boulogne. There was a hard frost, and the Pas de Calais, like Kent, was covered with snow, but the roads were clear and good.

We stopped to drink our first wayside tea, this time on the snow and in bitter cold, and to rearrange the baggage so that the children could sit at the back on their own seats. Signposts to Étaples brought back memories to me of the war of 1914-1918, for Étaples was the first place in a foreign land in which I had ever stayed. It was Shrove Tuesday, and as we drove through villages we met children in fancy dress wearing masks and fantastic noses. By the time that Lent was finished we should be in our new African home.

It was the first time that any of the family, except Elizabeth and I, had seen anything of the devastation of Europe. Doreen was struck by the depressing atmosphere of all the small towns and villages, some of them shockingly devastated, and all of them with an air of despair and few people or cars about. It must be bad for the morale of people to live amid piles of rubble; and in some ways it seemed worse here than in parts of Germany. The people had an air of misery, cold and hunger.

Abbeville, in which Doreen and I for some reason or other had spent a night of our honeymoon travels, lay largely in ruins and Poix, which we reached at eight o'clock was also in a sad way. We

## WE START FROM UPHOUSDEN AND REACH ALGIERS

found the little Hôtel Cardinal, advertising "*Tout confort*," without much difficulty, and extricating myself from my voluminous wraps and the tightly-packed car I made my way into the pleasant warmth of the simple restaurant, where the good men of Poix were playing French billiards or grouped round the stove in the centre. Here I discovered that the miseries outside had not really sapped the courage, good humour and friendliness of French peasants.

Madame came forward and assured us that we could have rooms and that we could put the car in the *cour*. There, as we unpacked, the patron advised us to take our blankets as the central heating was *sinistré*. So indeed were all the water arrangements, but our rooms, though rather like frigidaire, were spotlessly clean, though Margaret and Elizabeth who shared a bed, swore their sheets smelt of beer. How friendly they were to us, the people in that inn! I think that that and the supper, which Margaret, who had survived the channel crossing only to feel rather unwell on the other side, described as one of the most welcome meals she had ever had in her life, rather marked a change in all of us, except perhaps the children who always seem on journeys to take the rough and the smooth very much for granted, falling asleep in any sort of position whenever nature demanded a rest. We all began to feel a holiday feeling. We had nothing to do except get ourselves to the end of the journey; the shambles was behind us.

We started off at half-past eight the next morning and reached the outskirts of Paris about eleven. We drove through the Porte de la Chapelle straight on to the familiar Rue Lafayette, Opéra, to the Louvre and Invalides. After a good many enquiries we found the *Ministère des Colonies*, now with the new name of *Ministère de la France d'Outre Mer*, which we found quite unfamiliar to the good Parisians of whom we asked the way. Here I found M. Augendre, on whom the Colonial Office had told me to call, just about to go out to lunch. It was too cold in Paris offices to stay longer than one could help. He told me that he would send a letter for us to take on our journey which I should find at Marseilles, and said that when we got to French West Africa I should call on all the district officers on the route as they would know we were coming. Then we had to find our way to the Rue Paul Cézanne to get petrol coupons, and



once we had found it a young lady in the office provided us with our requirements in almost less time than it takes to record the fact. We found our way out of Paris again through the forest of Fontainebleau where people were collecting firewood, some with horses and carts, but the majority with little handcarts, and reached Saulieu at eight o'clock and found rooms in a hotel which, though undamaged, seemed not so home-like as our previous lodging.

We had been told by the A.A. at Calais that while the roads in the north were good, in the south they were still icebound, so that as we headed on next morning into the south of France it was pleasant to find that they were wrong and that the world got warmer, almost hour by hour. It was a dull day and there was no sun, but as we wound round La Rochepot on the way to Châlons we had a beautiful view of the turreted, fairy-like château on a hill in the valley, and shortly afterwards were driving through vineyards. At Maçon as we followed the Saone it was pleasant to drive along the riverside, thinking how nice it would be in summer. Beyond Villefranche we stopped by the wayside for a picnic lunch. The sun had come out and it was comparatively warm. We waved to the trains, and won gay greetings from the engine drivers, as we ate hard-boiled eggs from Derbyshire which Elizabeth's mother had sent us. We wound our way through Lyons, crossing the Rhone twice, and following the river to Montelimar, city of nougat, where we stopped for Doreen to buy some, arrived at the Hôtel des Princes in Orange at half-past six.

Here in the south everyone and everything looked happier and better than in the north, perhaps because of the lack of ruins, though along the road-side there were line after line of rusty cars and lorries showing signs of bombing. What a difference it made to see the towns whole and well-kept, as the architecture changed from the grey-roofed, shuttered French houses of the north to the red, sloping roofs and rounded cupolas and the whitewash of the south!

The two memories of Orange were the lovely Arc de Triomphe and a thundering convoy of American tank transporters, preceded by jeeps with howling sirens with their banshee wail which echoed and re-echoed, making the evening hideous. So, only a few months before, I had entered Stuttgart with General Balfour and my charm-

## WE START FROM UPHOUSDEN AND REACH ALGIERS

ing American opposite number, General Parkman, on a tour of the American Zone.

A short run the next morning brought us to Marseilles. The children had firmly believed that at Avignon they would have to dance on the bridge before being allowed to pass, but, alas, our route by-passed the bridge—or all that is left of it—though the whole car was singing:

*“ Sur le pont d’Avignon,  
L’on y danse, l’on y danse.  
Sur le pont d’Avignon  
L’on y danse tout en rond.”*

The children indeed sang their way across most of Europe and Africa, *Christmas carols and Clementine being perhaps the favourite*, but a version of Tipperary “It’s a long way to Wagadugu” became quite popular.

Sadly enough, as Doreen said, all we got from Avignon was an appalling stench from carts cleaning out lavatories. It reminded me of the contraption which went round Lübecke in Germany sucking out the cesspits, and was known as the Loch Ness monster.

We drove through lovely country as we came into the mediterranean colours, the dark greens, the grey rocks, olives, vines and cypresses. We wound down a beautiful pass with distant views through Salon de Provence, looking for the first glimpse of the Mediterranean. There was gorse or broom in bloom, and though the day was dull we felt that indeed winter had been left behind.

There were endless things to be done about the car at Marseilles, and we had to have it weighed before we could even collect the tickets to take it on board. It had almost become our home, and I felt like a hermit crab deprived of its shell when we left it at the quayside for the night. Doreen and I took the whole family to eat *bouillabaisse* at Pascal.

While Doreen, Elizabeth and I spent hours on various jobs the children and Margaret saw what they could. I love the Vieux Port with all its quayside life, its fish and fruit stalls and the mixture of races, but Margaret wasn’t too happy about it. The people, she said, all looked like cut-throats, and she was especially frightened by one

## THE "VILLE D'ORAN"

Indian performer with the most strange eyes, who looked as if he was trying to hypnotize the crowd. They watched a small boat bringing in sponges, and were astonished at the oysters and sea urchins and strange creatures of the sea being sold as food, which gave the place a dreadful prevailing smell of stale fish. I think perhaps you have to be an old resident of the East before you can appreciate the picturesqueness of these things without being upset by the smell.

It was difficult to find hotel accommodation, but we had a remarkably good dinner in a little restaurant—a vegetable soup, a fish mousse, beans in a very good sauce, beef steak as *supplément*, and a compote of oranges, the whole washed down with red wine.

We were early to bed and were up equally early to get the car and ourselves through the various formalities and on to the *Ville d'Oran*. Our car was the last but one to be loaded, the last being the first car of the many we were to see of English emigrants crossing the Sahara to South Africa. Its owners were plainly going to have difficulties for they had with them a heavily laden trailer, one of the best insurances for getting irretrievably stuck in the sand. As the ship moved out of Marseilles I saw again the sight which has so often moved me, the golden Madonna surmounting Notre Dame de la Garde, the shrine which is the mecca of so many of those who go down to the sea in ships. All that was good on the ship was the food. The ship itself had not recovered from being a British troopship. There were no baths, the sanitary arrangements were awful, the cabins half-furnished and overcrowded, and comfort was not to be found. There was a tremendous confusion with people coming and going, shouting and gesticulating, babies yelling and children getting in the way, but we settled down at last though no one had a particularly good night, and the ship began rolling in the early hours of the morning, which kept Elizabeth, Rahima and the children prostrate. Margaret, feeling very sick, courageously got up to attend Mass, from which one of the priests was counted out, and even more courageously to breakfast.

Twenty hours or so brought us to Algiers. The coast of Africa looked lovely as we came nearer. In the distance the high, white houses reminded Doreen of Mukalla seafont, until they resolved themselves into Frenchified Arab houses, appartements and government buildings.

## WE START FROM UPHOUSDEN AND REACH ALGIERS

This first view of Africa, the bright sunshine, the cloudless blue sky, the white buildings, the palm trees and the cool places, enthralled Margaret, and in the pleasure of this arrival the family's sea-sickness was soon forgotten.

When the ship came in the usual babel of French-speaking Arab porters began, and the passengers crowded the gangways and companion ways with themselves and their baggage in the usual stampede to get ashore. We being foreigners had to wait for our passports, and sat about in the saloon dazed by the endless coming and going and general hubbub.

As we left the ship we were met by Captain de Malglaive, the A.A. representative, who saw us through the Customs. Doreen was told to be along at two o'clock, when the car would be unloaded. She was there on time, but Algiers time, whereas French time, an hour earlier, had been intended. This, however, saved us 1,400 francs for she was able to drive it herself out of the yawning side of the ship on to the quay.

We were soon headed up the precipitous, winding streets of Algiers for the pleasant little suburb of Bouzareaa, ten kilometres inland, where Captain de Malglaive had found us rooms in the Hôtel de France. Here we lived for six days, busy completing all the preliminaries necessary to our journey.

### Chapter III

## THE BUSY HUM OF THE TOWER'D CITY OF ALGIERS

*L'écœur inespérée et qui ravit l'esprit, Alger qui a passé mes attentes !  
Qu'elle est jolie, la ville de neige, sous l'éblouissante lumière.*

MAUPASSANT.

*Everyone for himself is the gospel of all the large towns.*

BALZAC.

*All capitals are alike: all races mix there, all manners are confused  
together; it is not there one should go to study nations. . . . Study a people  
apart from its cities: it is only thus that you can know it.*

ROUSSEAU.

It is always difficult to particularize about a cosmopolitan seaboard town, and Algiers is no exception. So many races and cultures are usually to be found among the people, so many influences in the architecture and the general "atmosphere" that the result is a conglomeration from which it is difficult to distinguish a predominant characteristic. Seen from the sea Algiers is white, red and green; white houses with red roofs piled up against green hills. In one part it is Arab, with palm trees, mosques and minarets; in another it is Latin, with tall flat houses, shuttered windows, arcades and street cafés.

We soon got to know the principal thoroughfares, long busy streets such as Rue Michelet, the Rue d'Isly, both lined with shop windows displaying everything from rather shapeless evening dresses to shoes and saucepans, but at extravagant prices. Doreen thought that the cost of clothes and shoes were about the same as in England, but food about treble the price. There were cakes at ten shillings, small, rather dull pastries for sixpence each, and sweets at five shillings a pound.

Then there were the Boulevard Baudin and the Boulevard Carnot

## THE TOWER'D CITY OF ALGIERS

along the front with arcades and large grey or white buildings, housing the new Mairic, business offices, and, in the latter, the British Consulate General. From these main streets narrow roads led upwards to the hillside suburbs. A close acquaintance with the back streets showed us shabby walls, broken shutters and shabby, torn advertisements. It was, however, not so smelly as might have been expected.

Along the streets passed clanging, noisy trams of two to three coaches linked together, with a fascinating way of taking on or letting off passengers. As though by magic the doors slid open automatically and a step fell into position. When the conductor rang the bell to move on, the steps disappeared and the doors closed. Trams have seats for fourteen passengers and take a hundred and forty standing. The queue arrangements at the bigger stopping places, where you take your tickets before you board the trams, seemed much fairer than the London system, though sometimes someone would get away with diving under the railings and getting on out of turn. Trolley buses moved in strange silence compared with the trams and take passengers to the suburbs. Several days when we were without the car we had to use them. It was easy enough going down from Bouzarea, but getting back from the Place de Gouvernement was a formidable business. You buy your tickets before you get on and there were two lines of queue, one called *Priorité* and the other *Normale*. The former was for residents with certificates and the latter for casual visitors. This we learnt by asking the conductor. Having done so it was easy on later occasions to stand in the *Priorité* queue, for no one asked for certificates. The advantages were obvious; five were taken from that queue before one from the *Normale* was allowed to mount.

We generally had to stand most of the way. The driver, in spite of a notice saying "*Defense absolue de parler au chauffeur*", held furious conversation with his neighbours all the way, thereby incurring the disapproval of Margaret who, having an orderly mind, was inclined to mistrust the casual way in which other people disregarded rules and regulations. Standing in a crowd of hot humanity while the driver talked and gesticulated, crawling slowly up the hills, she found the mingled smell of fish and perfume somewhat overpowering.

Doreen and I, used to such things, were freer to delight in the picturesque and unusual.

It was pleasant to sit at a street café drinking coffee sweetened from a bottle of liquid saccharin, which at first we took for water, and watch the extraordinary mixture of colours, clothes and human features which passed by. There were Algerians of every shade, some in smart European suits with hats or tarbushes, others in galabiahs and grey or white caps; there were Arabs from the interior robed in burnouses and turbans; there were Frenchmen, dapper and neat, and carrying the inevitable portfolios; women entirely covered with white cloaks with white veils over their mouths and noses, padding silently along in sandals. There were short-skirted, painted women and there were the street urchins in any cast-off garments pestering passers-by to have their shoes cleaned.

A cosmopolitan town always gives an air of friendliness and gaiety, and so it might have been with Algiers, but to-day, like so many other places, Algiers is suffering from the effects of war. Life is terribly expensive. There is a black market for almost any commodity, including bread, and we were told that the poor are in fact practically starving. We were not in Algiers long enough to get to know the poorer quarters and those who live in them, and our contacts were with French people. Some of them voiced strong criticisms of the Government, saying it was its policy towards the Arabs that has led to the black market which, according to our informants, was in the hands of the Arabs. For instance, they told us, the Government issued milk and chocolate to Arab children—things unknown to them before. The parents promptly sold such things to the French for the highest prices they could get. Butter was 19s. 6d. a pound and bread which was controlled at five francs a loaf, sold in the black market at thirty. Needless to say, prices in shops, hotels and restaurants were high, and yet the latter were always crowded, and we came to the conclusion that the French, who certainly devote a great deal of attention to food, must spend a very large proportion of their salaries on meals in restaurants as the rations were barely enough for existence. There is no ration of milk at all for adults and no fats, except about a teacup full of oil for one person for a month; there is a quarter of a pound of coffee, and half a pound of sugar a

## THE TOWER'D CITY OF ALGIERS

month, and a loaf of bread, about half a pound, a day. Vegetables and fruit are free of control but expensive. Everything else is on the black market. Chickens are about thirty shillings each, eggs sixpence, fish ten shillings or so a pound, and the price of meat is very high. On the other hand, rents were low, and I was told that they had barely risen from pre-war figures. The price of a pound of butter would pay a month's rent of quite a decent house.

The mixture of races with different standards of living and the difficulty of competing with the business of living at all, has accentuated the political situation in Algeria. The position of the Europeans may be compared with that of those in the Union of South Africa, and so may the changes they have brought about. In the same way too they have shown themselves averse to seeing a rapid social advance of the indigenous population. In both cases this is probably due to economic factors, the unequal competition between people living in one place with widely differing standards of living. The Muslim population is much influenced by developments in the Middle East, and its generally low standard of living and poverty, brought into sharp relief by the prosperity of the Europeans living in their midst, is a political factor always to be reckoned with. The great difference between Algeria and South Africa is that the indigenous people of the latter country have a lower level of culture than Muslims, and are consequently not yet quite so politically minded.

In 1940, a first step towards revision of the constitution of Algeria was taken by the appointment of four councillors from the Muslim intelligentsia, and in 1944 westernized Muslims were granted full civic rights. Hitherto this had been denied to them because in order to attain it they would have had to abandon practices allowed to them by their faith and culture, such as polygamy. This requirement was now withdrawn and 80,000 Muslims benefited by it. The representation of the less advanced Muslims on the local assemblies was increased at the same time and French citizenship was conferred on all Muslims, the degree of the privilege thus conferred varying according to the stage of development reached by those concerned.

The Constituent Assembly of 1945 contained twenty-six delegates from Algeria, of whom half were elected by the Europeans and half by the remainder of the population. The Muslims included three



## PICNICS AMONG THE FLOWERS

socialists and three communists. At the second Assembly eleven of the Muslims were members of the Algerian Manifesto party. This party claims an Algerian Government on western lines, an Algerian parliament with equitable representation for the European French, the use of Arabic as the official language and the cessation of the traditional French assimilation policy. No communists were elected. The Manifesto party is led by Ferhat Abbas, a chemist by profession. Owing to political inexperience the party made a number of blunders, including supporting the communists in the Assembly and receiving their support in certain matters. Communists and Muslims were uneasy bed-fellows and their collaboration antagonized a large part of the Assembly. Thus Ferhat Abbas's party has as yet achieved little but experience, though it is plain that there is a forward trend in Algerian politics which will in time cause considerable developments in neighbouring areas. I noticed widely spread apprehension as to what these might be.

Living up in the hill-top suburb of Bouzarea was much more pleasant than it would have been if we had been housed down in Algiers, for it was an entirely country atmosphere in which we daily drove out for picnics into the green and flowery countryside, and enjoyed most beautiful views over green valleys and the lovely bay of Algiers far below. The air was fresh and warm, and it was difficult to believe that a few days earlier we had been shivering in ice and snow.

It was Rahima, Margaret and the children who saw most of Bouzarea. Doreen, Elizabeth and I made daily descents to Algiers, where there was almost as much to be done in preparations as in London, but we came back for the picnics at midday when everything in Algiers was closed. On these occasions the children wandered, gathering wild irises and marigolds, and we lay drowsy and peaceful in the sun. When we had gone back they sometimes walked round the village where Rahima's Arabic came in useful. The Arabs had no terrors for her, but Margaret at first sight found them very dirty, unattractive people. She and Rahima bought dates at fifty francs, or 1s. 11d. a pound, from some of their stalls, and she confessed that their greedy, brown faces, fringed with ragged beards, would have frightened her if she had been alone. She watched an Arab market

## THE TOWER'D CITY OF ALGIERS

in full swing, "crafty-looking specimens selling filthy-looking old clothes mixed up with gramophones and worthless trinkets," but both she and Elizabeth delighted in seeing for the first time oranges growing on the trees.

Our first call in Algiers was the Shell office, where we met M. Hubert just back from a trip to Tamanrasset and Colonel Nabal who knows the Sahara well and had travelled the Hoggar route. Colonel Nabal, whose advice and help were invaluable, took us first to the Department of Mines, where in no time we obtained coupons for petrol and oil, sufficient to last us as far as El Golea. Our next call was to the office of the S.A.T.T. in Rue Sadi Carnot, where we were given a letter of credit for petrol from El Golea onwards to Tamanrasset, and confirmed that our supply was ready at In Gezzam.

Colonel Nabal was perturbed at the idea of us going on this journey with only one spare tyre, and took me to get a *bon* authorizing me to purchase one. The helpful officer who provided this was housed in an old Arab palace, coolly roofed with glazed green tiles, and the visit enabled me to see two such buildings, one of which struck me as extremely beautiful in its interior decoration, recalling *kasbahs* I had seen in Tangiers.

It is in this western end of Algiers that you find the buildings of the old city, the eastern limit of the Al Moravid empire and in later times a stronghold of the Barbary corsairs. By Eastern standards Algiers is not a very ancient city. It was founded just over a thousand years ago by a governor of the central Maghreb, casting off the distant shackles of the Fatimites. Like most strong Arab dynasties the Almoravids rode out of the desert on the crest of a wave of reforming zeal. They owed their origin to a theologian of Sijilmasa who conducted a militant missionary crusade in Senegal in the eleventh century. He enlisted a thousand disciples living in guard-houses with the garrisons to engage in jihads and from this they took their name, the Al Murabitun, those who live in a *ribat* or guard-house. From this word comes the word *marabout* (*murabit*), the common term used to denote a *weli* or saint in North Africa. There was much about Abdullah ibn Yasin and his marabouts which recalls Al Mohajir and his Seiyid disciples in the Hadhramaut, and perhaps still more the Wahabis in modern times.

## EFFECTS OF BLACK MARKET ON DUCKS' EGGS

I called on the Consul General who told me a good deal about the English emigrants. Many of them came ill-equipped with unserviceable cars or insufficient food and money. Some failed to get further than Algiers, though most apparently got through to their destinations somehow. As I have already said, we had crossed with one such party from Marseilles, two men, three women and three children, one of them only eighteen months old. They were later advised to leave their trailer behind as it would be hopeless to attempt to cross the desert from Tamanrasset with it.

De Malglaive had invited us to his home one evening for a drink. He too lived in Bouzareaa, at the bottom of a narrow, twisty, almost perpendicular, lane. Here we spent a pleasant hour, finding that Mrs. de Malglaive was a close neighbour of ours in Kent. She had been in Algiers all through the German occupation, when living was much less expensive, though the present difficulties were largely due to the Germans having taken as much as they could out of the country. During this time de Malglaive had been in the army, serving in Europe, the Middle East and West Africa. Mrs. de Malglaive kept ducks. In the past these ducks had laid the perfectly respectable pale blue eggs common to ducks, but they had of late had to be fed on black market food, with the extraordinary result that the eggs were black, *coal* black! I could hardly have believed this if Mrs. de Malglaive had not actually shown us the black eggs.

Meal times at our hotel were pretty irregular, sometimes we had hours of waiting for supper. The two garçons, Ali and François, bandied Arabic with Rahima, she chiding them for religious laxity and scolding them for the strange French words they mingled with their Arabic, while they laughed at her as a puritan and rather uncivilized. They giggled and juggled plates as they talked, though nothing happened in the way of food for a long time, which meant that Zahra and Leila were very late going to bed. We drank Algerian wines with our meals. François had first recommended Smallah to us, which is a rosé, dry but good and refreshing. Later we changed over to Sidi Brahim, a red, pleasant tasting wine with more body. Rahima was shocked at a wine being labelled with the name of a saint, and thereafter we used to demand a bottle of the *weli* or *marabout*.

## THE TOWER'D CITY OF ALGIERS

One of the other things we did was to take our car to the chief mechanic of the S.A.T.T. for his advice as to whether it was suitable for the journey. M. Polony was a quiet, but large and impressive figure who inspired immediate confidence. There was little he did not know about the road and the sort of vehicle that could or could not travel on it. He summed up ours by saying we should have trouble but should get there. It had too low a clearance and he arranged to have the number plates lifted, part of the rear mudguards cut away, part of the exhaust pipe cut off and protection plates lined with felt put round the petrol and water tanks to avoid their being pierced by flying stones, and this was done at a little garage run by two of his former assistants in the Rue Livingstone. They also provided two admirable sand hoes and put in a shelf under which the baggage could be stowed to prevent its jumping about. The baggage not in daily use we carried on the roof, which also had a rack for five jerricans of petrol.

It was a privilege to meet M. Estienne, the Director of the S.A.T.T. and with his brother one of the great pioneers of Saharan travel. I could not, however, help feeling sorry when I learnt later that the S.A.T.T. now was far more interested in air travel than in the bus route, at any rate to the south of El Golea where the hotel organization so carefully built up is being allowed to fall lamentably below its previous high standard. Necessary as the air route is it is not a substitute for land travel. They are complementary one to the other, and I am sure it is good that the desert should be better understood by more people. The provision of reasonably decent hotels has also a considerable effect on the morale of those who are stationed in these little places.\* M. Estienne kindly arranged to let us have a chauffeur mechanic from El Golea to Zinder, which I felt was a necessary insurance against difficulties we might meet which might be too much for our own efforts.

Changing money was an operation that took Rahima, Elizabeth

\* I was glad to receive a very kind letter later from M. Georges Estienne in which he states that while their present efforts were directed to improving the air services, it was by no means the intention to abandon the car services. They have a programme for reorganizing the hotels and providing again comfortable vehicles. They expect to provide a marked improvement in road and hotel services for the 1947-48 season.

## TRIALS OF MONEY CHANGING

and myself a whole morning to achieve, while Dorcen and Margaret obtained bread coupons for the journey from the Mairie. We cashed traveller's cheques at Barclays Bank, but to change French money into Algerian could only be done at the Banque d'Algérie. Dorcen and Margaret went to the bank on another day and for some curious reason, although our calls were made in the morning, the vast hall was always littered with waste paper. Each transaction had to be dealt with separately. A Moroccan note which we had been given for change at the Customs had to be changed at one grille; French notes at another; French five-franc coins at another and two and one francs at a fourth. Changing English money was even more complicated. I thought of keeping the bulk of our English money for later use, but some of the girls had change amounting altogether to fifteen and twopence. To change this required a journey upstairs and downstairs and took three different calls and about an hour in time!

Every single person with whom we had to deal in Algiers had given us most ready and considerable help, and I shall always have the pleasantest recollections of my meeting with Governor Gauthier, Director of the Colonial Service office at Algiers. The letter which Augendre had promised would reach me in Marseilles, and which the Director at Marseilles had undertaken to forward to Algiers, somehow missed me, and M. Gauthier gave me a charming letter of introduction to the French authorities on the route, asking that they should reserve for me the "welcome which awaits in all our territories a representative of an allied and friendly nation, and to facilitate his journey in the best way." M. Gauthier's service has mostly been in Indo-China, but I was impressed with his views on the necessity for our collaboration in Africa.

The alterations to the car were finished by Friday and we felt then that we had done all we could in taking the precautions necessary, so we decided to start off the next morning, the 1st of March.

## Chapter IV

### THROUGH BARBARY TO THE SAHARA

*Barbary is a narrow slip of land by the sea-side. The famous mountains of Atlas divide it from the great desert of Sahara, and keep off some of the heat.*

*Barbary is a land full of streams, flowing from the mountains, and of flowers, covering the earth like a splendid carpet. . . . The flowers make amends for the want of trees; the hyacinth, the jonquil, and the iris, display their bright colours; the red and white cistus smell sweet as roses; and the white and yellow broom upon the sides of the hills, look like snow and gold.*

FAR OFF.

*Seek him that maketh the seven stars and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night: that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth; the Lord is his name.*

AMOS.

WE started out of the hotel gate on the serious part of our journey in picnic spirit. Elizabeth was driving again. She had chosen as her trans-African garb a pair of brown slacks with a khaki shirt, reinforced when it was cold by her A.T.S. battle blouse. Her short brown hair with springy curls practically concealed a little leather cap, which I called her football cap. Later it blew off and got lost in a sandstorm. She had a trick of skilfully changing her dark glasses for horn rims while driving, which somehow underlined her air of calm efficiency. Five of us had glasses of one sort or another, but she was the only one who took real care of hers. There was always confusion as to which was who's. Five pairs of glasses lying on a table, as they sometimes did, made an unusual still-life conversation piece, for somehow their attitudes told something of the nature of their owners. Doreen's perhaps had most personality in their careless abandon.

It was just noon when we got away. The morning had been taken

up with packing and Elizabeth and Margaret had gone off early to get petrol, discovering, alas, that the drainage stopper of the reserve tank did not fit and the petrol ran out. We had not been able to get enough in England to test our tanks and both had leaked. We had to leave this to be put right at El Golea, where of course the petrol was more expensive.

Looking back it seems to me that the three principal colour impressions of the journey were green on the first section, brown on the second and red on the third. The green, alas, was all too brief, but to-day it was at its brightest and best, a loveliness of which we had been deprived in England, and which I had wanted to see awaken in a Kentish spring.

The day, the air and the country certainly deserved superlatives, and, Algiers behind us, we felt a great sense of freedom. Margaret had found the mountains round Algiers all enclosing, cutting her off from the world, whereas at home among her native hills and glens she claimed it was open and serene, though a bleaker beauty altogether. Bouzarea, she felt, was an escape from the world of reality, but to-day, seeing the mountains rise in blue peaks and they and the hills and sea merging, as she put it, into one deep blue veil, she thought it was the most incredibly beautiful scenery she had ever seen. As we turned off the El Biar road towards Dely Ibrahim and Duera, the rolling meadows on each side of the road were clad in green, bespangled with primrose yellow "buttercups". The verges were daisy carpeted, and where the soil showed it was red and often planted with vines. Doreen, expecting an Arab countryside to *be* Arab, found the Frenchified Arab named villages incongruous with their boulangeries, charcuteries and épiceries, with churches and mosques cheek by jowl.

At the Quatre Chemins cross-roads we turned in to the main road south from Algiers. In the distance before us, but growing ever closer, were the Atlas mountains looking very high and purple. At Blida, where, for lack of signposts, we lost the way, we turned and ran along a poplar-lined road parallel to them till we took the road into the Chiffa gorges. In this lovely scenery there were waterfalls tumbling down the green hillsides which were covered with cypresses, vineyards and occasional cherry or almond trees with pink

## THROUGH BARBARY TO THE SAHARA

or white blossom. The engineering of roads, railway bridges and tunnels was most impressive.

To our disappointment we saw none of the hundreds of monkeys we had heard about, nor when we stopped the car did baboons climb on to the running boards and stretch out their arms for food. Presently we came out with the road running beside the river, and here we stopped to picnic on the green bank with the towering mountains on each side. On the other side of the river was the railway line, running in and out of tunnels. A train passed while we had lunch, to which we waved just as we had waved to a train outside Villefranche a few days before. The children filled the kettle in the river, while Rahima quickly got a fire going with the sticks and dry thistles we gathered. It was a whistling kettle which in the gloomy, chilly half-light of English winter's dawn had whistled to us from the kitchen at Uphousden. Now for the first time it whistled to us in Africa, echoing in these gorges. It whistled its way cheerfully across the Sahara and through the African bush. I am not sure that cheerful is really the right adjective for the sound it made, but I am quite certain that we grew to think it so because its whistle was so welcome.

In the afternoon we climbed more steeply up to the Col de Ben Chicao, watching mountain views unroll themselves below us. We wound round the railway station of Medea, revelling in the colours of the landscape, till we reached the summit of the Atlas, 3,900 feet high.

Here on the mountain top and on the start of our descent, our eyes could range over the country behind us—the green section—and the brown which was to come. We had a sight of the past, gilded and tinted into an ineffaceable memory, and a vision of the future, whilst we stood or moved in a present so delightful that it seemed like a dream contrasted with our life up to less than a fortnight earlier.

It was the present which attracted the children most, Leila demanding attention for the sheep and the goats and the lambs and Zahra for the Arabs riding on donkeys. The shepherds with their flocks and sheepdogs standing by the roadside stared in on us and waved to us as we waved to them. "Bright blue eyes staring out of golden brown faces," said Margaret, who was struck too with the intelligent faces of the great shaggy, cream coloured dogs.



## GLORIES OF THE ATLAS

The glories of the mountain world behind us brought involuntary exclamations of wonder from us all. Rahima, struggling with unexercised superlatives and seeking for adequate epithets in English, was awe-struck at the height of the mountains and their colours. The rocks on the mountain-tops glowed in shades of gold and brown, green, purple and grey under a cloud-free blue sky, and in the distance the bare earth was a brilliant pink. Around in the valleys were olive groves in green and gold.

We were all stirred by the miracle of the mountain landscape stretching far—north, east and west—around us, but I think Elizabeth and Margaret, newcomers to African scenery on the grand scale, were the most surprised. The reality so much exceeded expectation, for no description written or photographed or even painted could have conveyed a tithe of what the original was like. Till you have seen views like this you are apt to interpret descriptions of it in terms of what is familiar to you, and the sudden expansion of the world you have known so confidently comes with a shock. It was a glad revelation to both of them and justified their adventure to themselves.

The road clung to the steep mountain-sides round which it wound and threaded in and out and we had a wayside tea, with our feet as it were, dangling over an abyss facing south. Down below us fell precipitous tree-clad gorges, but far away in the distance, waiting as in a dream of remembrance, stretched a horizon of barren purple mountains like a vision of lost Arabia. The view had come upon us suddenly; to me it brought the reminder that, wherever I may go or whatever else I may see or do, I belonged in some special way to barren lands contained by far-off hills like those I now saw. I had a feeling of home-coming, and of sadness in the knowledge that they must be passed and left behind for something quite different.

Often I have tried to analyse the mysterious and, partially perhaps, unnatural attraction which deserts have for some of us, but never with complete success. I have read the attempts of others to do so but, while rarely finding much to disagree with, I have never found a satisfactory answer. It is of course closely connected with the "call of the East" and the attraction which almost any Briton who gets to know the Arab feels for him. Arabs and deserts are almost inseparable; but while the sunshine and colour of the east and the

independence of spirit and other characteristics of the Arab, which find an echo in our own hearts and make friendship between our races so real and lasting, account for much they are not cause enough. Certainly in me there is something instinctive which I have felt from childhood and which years of deserts and Arabs have done nothing but strengthen. Whether the moving finger will ever beckon me back to the desert lands as a sojourner, or to remain as one who has strayed from his rightful place, I know not, nor could I tell whether I should count the world well lost for a desert if I found myself in such a case. But I think I might discover the next world more easily should it happen to me.

For where is God more evident? . . .

Those hackneyed lines "One is nearer God's heart in a garden than anywhere else on earth," inspired by a *Kentish garden*, are easy to believe in the peace and stillness of a scented summer evening in a riot of garden such as Uphousden, even when digging and working and weeding in it. Certainly God loves gardens. "God Almighty first planted a garden," said Francis Bacon, beginning to design one much more elaborate than Eden, though he might have approved Uphousden as at least a little resembling the third part of his plot—"a heath or desert in the going forth." And Isaiah proclaimed that "the desert shall rejoice and blossom like a rose."

Yes, I can feel like Enoch as I walk in the garden in the evening,

'and yet the fool  
 Contends that God is not,  
 Not God! In gardens? when the eve is cool?  
 Nay, but I have a sign:  
 'Tis very sure God walks in mine.'

Yet here I was, feeling more like Moses on Nebo than Enoch, though my Canaan was certainly no land flowing with milk and honey, and as certain as ever that it is in the solitudes of the desert that God is seen more clearly. There in the desert is the source of the greatest inspiration ever vouchsafed to man. I remember in Aden during the war seeing an interesting letter in which the writer said of the Western Desert—"But on the credit side the comfort and freshness of the buildings was a tonic after the decayed barn-like aspect

## THE PURPOSE OF DESERTS

of those here" (i.e., in Aden. How right he was!) "Give the I-ties their due, they have certainly made a fine job out of *one of the least inspiring regions on earth.*" I felt sorry for him, that he could see no further than the desolation and miss the sense of inspiration which the desert brings when you can open yourself to receive it, even in the small degree possible to the ordinary ones—the majority—of us.

I well remember too the horror which an agriculturist patently felt when I took him for the first time in his life into the desert. He could not believe that God had created such a vast area of the earth's surface which was in his mind so utterly wasted. But is it wasted? For myself I feel surely that God created these deserts for a purpose, as places where those great prophets who have interpreted Him to man, and have given us all that is most inspiring in the lives of the great majority of the human race, could speak with Him face to face.

Surely the garden is in some, but greater, sense like the pictures, the statues, even the idols which among those of many faiths help them to bring their minds more closely to God. In the market-place and among other haunts of men, tied to the ordinary humdrum things, the mind of man is not capable of perpetual concentration on infinity. It would take him all his time doing nothing else but attempt it. Thus perhaps the fact that God is a spirit has often been obscured, and many are the painters who have striven to picture Him in human terms.

Yet the Muslim of the desert—the man who has surrendered himself to God—finds no need of such aids. He never has found it though Muhammad had to forbid the making of images to the dwellers in towns. I have found among Muslims more sense of the abiding presence of God than anywhere else, and that I believe is largely because the wideness of the desert and its utter lack of complication portrays the spiritual, all enveloping, all seeing and all mighty nature of God more faithfully than anything else. There is—almost—nothing there but God and nothing to detract the mind from Him. That is why all the great monotheistic religions have come out of the desert.

This was in my mind as I gazed Sahara-wards from the heights of the Atlas, but I do not think it explains all the poignancy of my feelings. Nor do I think I can discover quite what stirred me so deeply.

## THROUGH BARBARY TO THE SAHARA

Of course, the scene before us was familiar to Doreen, but I do not think the others got beyond feeling that there was some elusive quality in the promise displayed which might unfold itself when experience drew back the curtain of distance. Of its beauty they were convinced, but that they liked it better than the glories of the green world they had just seen they could not say. After all, despite its rare splendour that scene belonged to a world where man lived and worked and which was to that extent familiar, while before us now lay empty deserts, strange and perilous. They could more easily appreciate the heat, the sand, the blinding glare of which we had spoken than the other things which one can only know after personal experience.

And of these things lying beyond the horizon I was not too sure myself, nor was Elizabeth, thinking practically of the obstacles to pass. Although I felt confident that most of the conditions we should meet would be familiar, it was in fact a strange land of which we had no experience. Everybody had emphasized difficulties, and I did not feel fully confident that we were sufficiently well equipped to surmount them. Cars are tricky things to those who are not mechanics. We had, however, done all that we could and I felt that the rest lay in the hands of Providence. I know that I put up many a prayer for a good deliverance.

Soon after we had finished gazing on these distant scenes we went on and round a corner came on a view of the little town of Berruaghia on the hill slope opposite. It lay among cypress trees, a village of red roofs and dun-coloured walls. It was plainly shabby when we drew near.

"A dirty little town," said Margaret.

"Squalid," corrected Elizabeth.

We stopped at the post office where Doreen tried to post back Elizabeth's and Margaret's winter suits to their respective homes. The post office, however, after much research decided they could take no parcel of more than a kilogramme in weight and so the two parcels remained, getting in the way of the passengers in the car, until they were finally exiled to the roof for the rest of the way to Tamale.

The little Hôtel de France might easily have been in any small

French country town, and there was little difference between it and those we had stayed at in France. Indeed, it seemed far more like them than the Hôtel de France at Bouzarea. Even Doreen, who always removes her spectacles to avoid seeing the grubbiness in places such as this, admitted it was dirty, but the patronne was kind and welcoming. She had two rooms for us, one with two beds upstairs and one for Margaret, Rahima and Elizabeth down. They were glad when a little later she offered them a room with only two beds upstairs because the downstairs one, in a sort of out-house across an empty yard, dripped with moisture and the sheets were damp. We had a good dinner of macaroni soup, tinned peas and baked potatoes mixed with egg, followed by a sweet chestnut purée.

It was rather a stuffy, dingy dining-room.

"Why are all French hotel dining-rooms painted grey?" asked Doreen. "Is it cheap?"

There was a cheerful, noisy French party at the next table. They were six men and one woman. I felt we ought to mix and redress the balance. We got friendly as the meal wore on, washed down with quite good red wine.

Next morning, on the last slopes of the hills in a wide valley, less tree-clad but still green, we saw much ploughing, mostly with mules and donkeys, though there were some oxen. The small farmsteads were not very Arab in appearance as they had sloping roofs, no doubt because of heavier rain than further south. Turning a bend we came on beduins and flocks of sheep and goats on the hillside. There, in the distance behind us, were the mountains and all the loveliness of the Arab Mediterranean countries.

I have no distinct memory of where the green part of our journey ended and the brown began, but it must have been somewhere near Boghari. From richly-clad mountain country we came on to a dry, sandy plain covered with scrub, which Margaret found intolerably monotonous after the overwhelming variety of the mountain scenery, though soon she found this new type of barren country taking on a beauty of its own. First the dunes of rippled sand, and later the bare and rocky steppes emerging. We were in a wide plain. Boghari was the last village to have a really French look, though it was strange somehow to hear the church bells ringing, for

## THROUGH BARBARY TO THE SAHARA

it was Sunday, as we came into it. We stopped and bought fresh baked bread with our tickets.

Speeding south we suddenly came across two beduins on the road leading a herd of dark brown camels, large humped and shaggy-haired beasts. They were the first we had seen since leaving Arabia in 1944. It is at moments like this that one understands what the expression "feeling your heart expand" means. We were back with our own. In the way of all camels they were stupid, and turned and galloped ahead of us. No matter how flat the country on each side of the road may be it is often almost impossible to persuade a camel to turn aside.

Now indeed we trod on the skirts of the real desert country. Only a few miles before there had been long, low hayricks and muddy pools of water, but here was the desert of brown, yellow or red sand, blue sky, grey green scrub, brown camels, and beduins in long off-white or brown cloaks. There were villages with one-storeyed mud dwellings, each having an open courtyard inside and, strangely enough, mud chimneys. Mosques had high, but not tapering, minarets. Here and there were groups of hair tents. The people looked at us with curiosity, and Margaret was intrigued with the women, for the most part peering with one eye through their veils.

Ahead of us on each side of the road was a range of mountains, Sabaa Rus, whose seven heads clearly identified it. Every now and then we came near to the little single-track railway, and the clay and the buildings were all red ochre. Hassi Bahbah, where we could find no petrol, was an entirely Arab village. Beyond it stretched the *Terres Blanches*, a very empty sandy plain covered with green clumps and later with tamarisk.

There was a great deal of emptiness in which sand grouse and small brown birds were the only life. Now and then a locust flew across our path, till soon we passed through a great swarm on an east to west flight. The sky was thick with them, and they clattered on to the car. They were red with black and white striped wings. We had to shut the windows to keep them out; but we had crossed the swarm in five minutes and reached a little oasis by the river Melah, where there was an orchard with fruit trees clad with pink and white bloom. Here we picnicked and the children found fine big frogs.

## THE OASIS OF LAGHUAT

We had no sooner started away than again we crossed a swarm of the red locusts, and as we went through the Waleid Nail country we came to little Arab hamlets with gardens of fruit trees in bloom : oases in a stony wilderness round which the beduins camped in their red and black tents.

Dorcen took pleasure in the occasional inns by the wayside, with their walled court-yards with rooms round them and Arabs wrapped in cloaks sitting at the gateways. Margaret remarked the cemeteries, wondering at the different kind of graves for men and women, and perhaps a little dubious about the authenticity of the saints whose domed tombs were a feature of each. There were numerous brick wells along the sandy plain, and at intervals a group of beduins resting in a circle, shepherds with flocks or children laden with firewood.

At Djelfa, where the railway ended, we tried to get petrol, but as it was Sunday the pump was locked. A helpful young man guided us to various places where the merchant might be, without success.

The view beyond Djelfa became more and more familiar. The Rochers des Pigeons were exactly like Hadhramaut jōls and the scenery was such that you could match anywhere in our old home. At last we crossed the wide iron bridge over the Wadi M'Zi and came into the town of Laghuat, the first of the big desert oases. The sun was setting on a new and striking scene. Even Elizabeth, who hides her emotions, had to call it very lovely, while Margaret, seeking for the poetry within her, drank in the colours. "On our left the bare rocks were tinged a warm and rich burnt sienna. On our right was the dark saw-edged Waleid Nail mountain, a handle with a set of sharp teeth, the handle crowned with a fortress. Over this the sun was setting in amber gold, emerald, rose and purple, changing to misty blue on the left." The air was wonderful and exhilarating.

Laghuat is set among palms and cultivation, with pink and white mud houses, tall minarets and European houses built to suit the general picture. There are about fourteen to fifteen thousand inhabitants and it had a busy, crowded air. As we drove into the town an Arab policeman stopped us, and giving me a piece of paper asked me in French if I knew the person whose name was written on it.

## THROUGH BARBARY TO THE SAHARA

As it was my own, that presented no difficulty and shortly afterwards the Chief of Police called upon us in the hotel, giving us an invitation to take an *apéritif* with the *Administrateur* and his wife. The policeman who guided us to their house through the soft night was delighted to speak Arabic to us, and told us that the administrator was a man who spoke Arabic well and cared for Arab ways. Our young and delightful hosts welcomed us in one of those pleasant semi-Eastern houses which the French are so good at building and furnishing. We drank French *apéritifs* and ate olives, dates and little cakes.

Although Algeria is administered by the Ministry of the Interior our host was seconded from the Colonial Service and was the first civil administrator. He and his wife had only been at Laghuat four months and had moved many times in their career, but always in North Africa. Our hostess told Doreen that fruit and vegetables were good in Laghuat and eggs obtainable, but there was no milk or fish. There was camel meat in plenty but little else.

After a happy and interesting hour in which I began to feel conscious of the great work that France has done in the desert, we went back to the hotel to dinner, wondering how soon it would be that all that these desert administrators wished to achieve would materialize. We had been told that funds had been voted for planting wells every forty kilometres, so that beduin shepherds would not have more than twenty kilometres to go to water their flocks. Great desert though the Sahara is, it will, like any other, blossom as the rose if only the life giving water is brought to the surface.

My best memory of Laghuat is in the quiet of the night on the hotel roof, back with all the magic glory of a desert sky. The velvet star-strewn night with an amber-coloured half moon was itself more luminous than the lights on the hill which only served to decorate its sable lustre, like golden sequins on a gown. There were lovely silhouettes of palms and buildings, and above us, as on all our travels, shone Orion. Ever since the days of our first long journey in the Hadhramaut the soldier-constellation of Orion with his glittering belt, gleaming sword and Rigel, his shining foot, has seemed the guardian of my ways in Arabia, in Germany, even at Uphousden, where I found him in November standing above the bay where



## OUR FIRST DISASTER

Julius Cæsar and Augustine first set foot in England. I called Elizabeth and Margaret to hear the call to prayer coming clear and insistent from the minaret of the mosque. Strings of camels padded up the street, making no sound beyond a shuffle as their padded feet came down on the gritty sand.

In the morning, while Doreen, Elizabeth and I saw to the car and got petrol, Margaret and Rahima bought bread, oranges and dates from a very friendly Arab who allowed them to taste the latter before they bought them, and lent them a basket to bring their purchases to the car. Just outside the town we saw a huge notice-board directing us to the Grande Route Impériale to the south and French West Africa, and we passed a large caravan of English trekkers who the night before had been encamped outside the hotel yard, cooking their supper as we turned in.

Here and there by the wayside were little muraba'as, cubical stone windowless shelters, of exactly the same pattern as those of the Hadhramaut. There were little clumps of scrubby thorn trees and bush. It is strange how driving through deserts one inclines to note down minor objects such as these. There is so little else to note that even details tend to assume the proportions of important geographical features. We could not miss the road for one line of telegraph wires and another of electricity pylons stretched all the way from Laghuat to Ghardaia. Doreen remarked it would be well if the French colonized Kent, so that we might have electricity at Uphousden.

We passed by the borj of Tilremt without stopping. Here there is a restaurant said to be famed for its gazelle pie, but we proposed to picnic on the roadside, and thereby missed an invitation to lunch at Berrian. It was perhaps as well we did so for it was not yet midday when we had our first disaster, a puncture which resulted in the destruction of the tyre and tube on the stony road. Passing Arabs on a lorry packed with men and sheep kindly stopped and speedily changed the wheel for us, but it was a quarter to three before we reached the outskirts of Berrian, the first of the seven cities of the M'Zab.

We came out of the stony desert into the vivid green of this oasis of crowded palms. There were siqayas or water fountains, just as

in the Hadhramaut, on either side of the road. We passed between date palms and wells like those of any Hadhramaut oasis, and it was not until we came upon the town, perched on a hill, that we saw how different the domestic and mosque architecture was. Welis' tombs, muraba'as, wells and siqayas were Hadhramaut enough, but single storeyed dwellings were quite different. There were narrow, clean streets and the mosques were rectangular tapering affairs. Rahima said one of the minarets looked like our Sultan in the Hadhramaut, and the utter rest and peacefulness of this cool and emerald green oasis brought to Margaret's mind the lines of her favourite psalm. "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in cool pastures."

Soon after leaving Berrian we were passed by a car, and a little later stopped as we found it halted by the wayside repairing a puncture. It was Commandant Gauthier, Commandant of the Ghardaia Annexe, who had come to Berrian to meet us and who had sent that kind invitation to the borj at Tilremt. He invited us to tea with some Arab friends by the wayside, and we drank delicious minted tea in little glasses. We had already discovered that it was difficult to make our Arabic understood with the people in the markets of the oases, but these were cultured, educated men of great charm and friendliness who were amongst the principal of the M'Zabites, and we had no difficulty in talking with them.

On these occasions we were generally introduced as coming from the Island of the Arabs, from somewhere south of Mecca, for most people had not heard of the Hadhramaut. Arabia, however, was generally sure to arouse interest, and most people were surprised and interested to know how like the deserts of Arabia were to the Sahara. These people of the M'Zab are by faith Ibadhis, followers of Abdullah bin Ibadh who flourished in the eighth century. It is a sect that founded its principal stronghold in Oman, and it is only in Oman, Zanzibar and the M'Zab that to-day substantial colonies of these Kharijis or Seceders are to be found. This is well known to the M'Zabites, so that by telling of my Ibadhi friends in Muscat and Zanzibar I was sure of an interested and friendly audience. There are a great many M'Zabites in Algiers where they go to make their money, but they generally retire back to the valleys of the M'Zab

just as Hadhramis in Java hope to return to their beloved valleys in their homeland. Leo Africanus speaks of the M'Zab as a trading centre in his day, saying that the merchants of Algiers came there to trade with those of Timbuktu.

Less than half an hour after leaving this pleasant party we reached Ghardaia, climbing down the winding 'aqaba to the valley oasis, a scene of great beauty and loveliness. Arab women in bright crimson and blue garments waved as we drove in, and small boys jumped on to the car behind. All the buildings were yellow ochre or pure white, sometimes with green shutters.

We saw the attractive Zouave trousers which most Europeans wear in the desert. It is a dress not native to the Sahara, but well adapted to it, and it is much worn through French West Africa. As however, one would expect, although it is such a sensible dress from the point of view of comfort and mosquitoes, it is not a garb that has made any appeal in the British Colonies, where British prejudices are always against anything that savours of the bizarre or eccentric. A former Governor of the Gold Coast wrote of the Zouave trousers he acquired at Timbuktu, and of the look of horror on the face of the political officer when he descended from his car thus clad at Navrongo in the Northern Territories.

Asking the way to the hotel a creature I mistook for a hotel servant leapt on the running board and guided us there, and then took Elizabeth and me to a well-meaning but incompetent African who had a little shop where he mended punctures. The hour we spent there having our tyre mended was wasted for, as we discovered in the morning, he had failed to remove the nail from the tyre which was again flat.

Ghardaia certainly has the best of the Saharan hotels on this route. It was built in Arab style round a courtyard with a pleasant garden, and had a manager who took the liveliest interest in his guests. Everything was spotless and it was furnished in good taste. Our room had a tiled bathroom and shiny bath, the first we had seen since leaving England. The Commandant came in before dinner and we talked pleasantly round the bar, a circle of French and Arab and English. Some of the Arabs drank alcohol, but I noticed that the Ibadhis stuck to lime juice.

## THROUGH BARBARY TO THE SAHARA

The dining-room had shaded lights for the town is lit by electricity from the Laghuat power station brought by the pylons we had followed. What enterprise! The service was good and the dinner simple but well cooked; soup, cauliflower, goat and lettuce, cheese and confiture. When we had finished Doreen and I mounted to the verandah of our bedroom. Doreen, leaning on the verandah railing, said:

"The silence of an Arab town is heavenly to listen to." So it is, and any sounds only underline the silence. The call to prayer we had heard earlier. Now, although it was not yet late, a cock crowed, and occasionally there was the slippered tread of an unseen Arab passing by.

Chapter V  
EL GOLEA

*Lo, then would I wander far off, and remain in the wilderness.  
I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest.*

PSALMS.

*Fair, ah, fair, is the sunny Orange Garden,  
Secret and shady, scented and green,  
Gold, red gold, are the oranges in clusters,  
Fragrant and bright in their ripened sheen.*

WALTER B. HARRIS.

*Translation from the Moorish.*

DAWN had scarcely broken when we were ready to go. We had wanted to reach El Golea, but in the desert, as we had been told many years ago in the Hadhramaut, there is no programme, and the only way of making rapid progress is to take things as they come. My indignation, therefore, when I found that the tyre we had had repaired the night before was flat was on the whole philosophic. Disregarding the tout who had led us astray, I asked the manager for the best garage, and was directed by him to Bou Kamel. I was not at all sure that such a minor matter as a puncture would receive attention there for I had been told that the patron was choosy about the work he undertook.

We reached his large and imposing building before it was well open, though several garage hands were soon about. I explained our needs and was told that the tyre was quite useless as the torn lining would quickly cut the inner-tube. Finally it was thought that if it were lined with an old inner-tube it would do as a standby. I think they became friendlier as they discovered we spoke Arabic, and presently Bou Kamel himself came to greet us. It was plain that he was a figure of importance, for he had the presence and the measured gait of the Arab great, and was treated with respect by all. In a few minutes of courteous questioning he had all our history,

whence we came, whither we were going and what we did. He himself spoke of Zanzibar and its Sultan, and was plainly glad to know my past connection with that Prince. I told him of many of my Ibadhi friends and the tribes of Muscat and Zanzibar. Presently he fetched his little daughter and a small son. He had a family of ten, and from a window nearby came the sound of chanting infant voices from the school he had set up for the sons of his large staff. He was a man of many parts, a merchant well-known in these regions and he ran a bus service across the desert. He took great interest in our trouble, himself fetched us a box of baby talc powder to use should we have to put on our old tyre and bade us a courtly farewell.

When the work was over I asked the principal of his mechanics how much we owed and was bidden to go and see the patron in his office about that. There I met Bou Kamel again, and thanked him for the care that had been taken. Then I asked for his account.

"There is no account between me and thee," he said. "I am glad that we have been able to help a friend of the Arabs. Go in the peace of God and may God bring you safe to your journey's end."

This indeed was the old Arab courtesy born in the desert and, thank God, not only still existing in the desert but, as I shall relate, practised by the French who work in the desert places.

With all these delays we did not leave until just after nine, and made up our minds not to try to reach El Golea. Haste is of the devil, and haste I felt was likely to delay us more. Our kindly host of the hotel advised us to spend the night at a new borj, of which the builder had been in the pleasant party of the night before, and he undertook to tell Commandant Gauthier so that El Golea should not expect us that night.

We climbed out of the lovely valley by the southern 'aqaba, passing Beni Isgen, another of the seven towns, on the way. Like Ghardaia it was built on a little conical hill in the valley with a mosque topped by a tapering minaret at its summit. It was curious to see Ibadhi mosques with minarets, for in Zanzibar they are not approved. The key-note of the Ibadhi faith is simplicity. There must be nothing to take the mind from God, and apart from their minarets the mosques of the M'Zabites are as lacking in ornament as those of Zanzibar and Muscat.

## THE DISTANT BORJ IN THE DESERT

Hitherto the road had not been too bad. It was tarred as far as Laghuat, but soon after the imposing sign out of Laghuat it had degenerated to a rough and bumpy stony track, though here and there, through Berrian and for a short time before Ghardaia, there were tarred stretches. Now, however, we were to begin the rough part of the journey, and the road from Ghardaia to El Golea has been described by some as the worst of the whole Sahara crossing. I had been warned of the places where we might stick in the sand, and taking great care to choose the best passages and to rush them we managed, by lightening the car of its passengers and with advice from the drivers of two lorries that were embedded in one difficult section, to get through the day without being *ensablé*. We lunched in a shadeless spot, halting from twelve till just after three in order not to put too much strain on the tyres.

There was little to be seen on the road—a few well-built mura-ba'as, an emergency landing ground at Noumerate furnished with a windsock blowing out alone in the desert, kilometre stones along the way, but no longer the strange row of pylons and telephone wires which had led to Ghardaia. Now and then there was a dune across the road, and once a little flock of quail.

I was not quite sure how far it was to the borj and by dusk we had not seen a sign of it. At the last moment of light, as we breasted a rise from one jöl to another, I thought I saw something white in the distance under a lonely qara, and determined to press on till at least we had learnt what it was. After six or seven miles, and with the moon lighting up our way, we found it was indeed the borj called Hassi Fahal, underneath Qara Shamba. These lone conical hills of the Sahara are called *qara* as in the Hadhramaut, and Sha'amba is the name of the Arabs in the region. Once or twice in the last miles we had seen their little tents, and not far from the borj was another encampment where their evening fires were already alight.

The borj was very like the forts of Transjordan and those I had built at Leijun and Bir Asakir in the Hadhramaut, having a wide doorway opening on to a courtyard with quarters all round it. It was new and spotlessly clean. The gardien said he was an Alsatian, though later I was told he was a German. Elizabeth had talked to a German who had found his way across France and the desert and

was working in Bou Kamel's garage at Ghardaia; she had also met a German prisoner working in another garage in Algiers. Whatever the gardien was he looked after us well, cooking for us and bringing us water. We ate our meal on the flat roof and slept there in pure and wholesome air, though with all our blankets and coats we were cold.

Margaret, feeling the wonder of lying with only the stars and moon above her and the desert stretching round like an eternity, quoted: "Oh, lady moon, with what sad steps thou mountest to the skies."

We were stirring about five on the morning of the 5th of March, and saw the beauty of the setting moon as well as of the rising sun. We had breakfasted and were away by half-past six, again crossing the stony jōls with hardly a feature except an occasional well to record.

During the morning we had our first ensablément, from which we extricated ourselves in text-book style. In all the hundreds of times I had been stuck in the sand in the Hadhramaut, I never gave a thought to it, for there was always at least an Ali, a Yeslam or a Kandasa to rely on to get us out, and very often one could be sure that before long a crowd of helpful beduins would emerge from an empty landscape to push a car through the sand. Here, however, we had only ourselves to depend on. The car was heavy and our combined weight could not have produced any great effect. After we had dug down and put in the planks Doreen drove it out while behind, in descending gradation of height from myself to Zahra and Leila, we pushed. It always amused me to see these two small persons putting all their weight into this job. They were determined to do their share of the work, which was most unpleasant when the wheels failed to bite the planks and whizzing round raised great clouds of dust.

Once we stopped to give water and some cigarettes to an Arab driver, the only fellow creature we met, marooned with a broken-down lorry, and shortly after twelve began to seek some spot of shade in which to rest.

We crawled down a windy and sandy defile, with a vista of awful dunes around the corner. There was a minute patch of shade under



## APPROACH TO EL GOLEA

some rocks, and here we hoped to lunch. The wind, however, was blowing up and with it sand drove into our clothes and our eyes, so that it was hopeless to try and light a fire, and we ate uncomfortably in the car with all the windows closed. We endured this till just after two, by which time the sand storm was swirling all around us, and then we went on. As sand storms go it was not bad, for the Sahara like the Hadhramaut, goes in for storms which black out day, but it was exceedingly uncomfortable. Its worst feature as far as we were concerned was that with the sand driving thick a foot or so above the track, it was difficult to see holes and to know which were sandy places in which we might stick.

We came at last to an 'aqaba and a wadi full of large red sand drifts, one of which had settled on the road. On that slope it could not be taken fast and we stuck slightly, though four diggings got us out. A few miles further on we had our first sight of the oasis of El Golea, said to be the most beautiful of the Sahara.

I suppose those who don't know deserts find difficulty in appreciating the feelings of travellers who arrive at last in sight of an oasis. It is not only a thing of joy to behold but it fills you with a sense of relief that another stage is safely passed. More than that it is the world again, a world in which your fellows live lives like yours. Yet each oasis is like a world in itself. As you have probably met no one on the road you have a sensation of coming from another planet. Travelling alone by car I got this feeling much more than when travelling with a caravan of camel men, which is rather like travelling by ship.

As we entered its gardens and palm groves the sand storm ceased. We found our way through long, wide, well aligned streets walled by ordered shady gardens which bore unmistakable signs of careful European planning, and passing the beautiful gardens of the *Poste* came to the Hôtel Transatlantique, at which M. Estienne had told me we should stay if only for the reason that it would be the last place in which we could expect to find some comfort in the Sahara. It was certainly a fine hotel, built of mud with cool rooms and wide verandahs, but it did not come up to the standard of Ghardaia. The patron was kind, but obviously did not take the same interest as did our host of Ghardaia. He complained that in the Sahara it was

## EL GOLEA

always one thing or another—if the electric light was not ‘*en panne*’ it was the water supply. On our arrival it was unhappily the water, so that we had to content ourselves with washing in the basins in our rooms instead of finding that most grateful refreshment of desert travel, the house with a cold water shower. The dinner was poor. Wishy-washy soup, a hard omelette, the bones of some animal with macaroni, and good oranges.

I awoke in the morning with the usual feeling of having to be on the road again, but relaxed with sheer physical pleasure when I remembered that we had the whole day to spend in El Golea. It is true that we did not see much of it for Doreen, Elizabeth and I spent our day in the garage, where under the quiet and efficient supervision of M. Wasmer, the patron of the S.A.T.T. garage, all the little things on the car which needed attention were seen to. They made a new screw stopper for our reserve tank, and the car was greased and oiled, while Doreen unpacked and re-packed and Elizabeth swept it out.

From El Golea we were to take on the mechanic promised to us by M. Estienne. The actual man named we never saw, but M. Wasmer proposed to substitute for him a native of the place of Sudanese origin, who had long worked with him and drove lorries regularly to Tamanrasset, but he had only once, eight years before, gone as far as Agades. He was, said M. Wasmer “more courageous” and he had great strength which would serve us well when we got stuck in the sand. Furthermore, he was a conscientious mechanic. And so we met Muhammad Salim Kassou, who was to be our constant companion—and friend—for the next fifteen hundred miles or so. His constant cheerfulness, his willingness to do anything and everything, and his thoughtfulness in all circumstances, combined with the good manners of his race, did more to ease our journey than I can well say.

I expect that most of those who travel through El Golea with cars have much for which to thank M. Wasmer. Certainly we had, and we left it with the great confidence that all that could be done had been done. For the journey he advised me to take some *pâte*, a kind of macaroni or vermicelli to put in soup, which he was sure would be good for the children, if not for us. He took me in the

afternoon to meet Captain Lo, the *Chef de Poste*, who gave me a 'bon' to buy the pâté, and pressed on me another to buy sugar.

Captain Lo took me strolling through the shady gardens of the *Poste* where many a tropical tree flourished. Roses red as Caesar's blood raised their heads and shed their fragrance amid their soft green foliage, cheek by jowl with the red-gold globes which hung in the dark polished greenery of the orange trees. They brought to mind the scent of the rose fields and hedges of Sana, where once I was received in a room carpeted inches deep in shell pink blossom, full of tender perfume. As we walked in this gracious desert refuge, Lo talked with affection of the Arabs and told me that he had learned much from the *Sept Piliers de la Sagesse*.

El Golea is famed for its oranges, and while we were at the S.A.T.T. garage Rahima and Margaret went off with the children to buy some for the journey. They took a small boy as guide from the hotel, but he left them when they came to a wide and empty street saying "Here's the market." There were a few groups of people squatting round baskets piled high with a mixture of dates and flies, but that was all. Entering a shop Rahima found a small bearded man in long white nightshirt and white turban seated by two sacks of grain and a sewing machine, who promised to find her oranges and clean dates. While they waited they talked of the life of the Arabs in El Golea, and he asked them to take tea with his family that afternoon. Accordingly they all four set off later in the day and met their host, whose name they discovered was Salih, at his shop.

His house was nearby, a one-storeyed mud building with an inner courtyard. They introduced themselves, giving pleasure with their Arab names for Margaret arabized her second name as Miriam. He presented his young wife Biya in a small room where a very old, dirty woman sat cleaning millet. They told Rahima she was a slave, but Salih carefully explained that she was a slave by birth not by purchase, and jokingly offered Rahima a small black child. A carpet had been spread out in the courtyard and there they all sat eating groundnuts and drinking mint-flavoured green tea.

Biya was twenty-one and had been married at thirteen. She now had three daughters, Ninna, Inna and Lilla, as well as a small son Musa. She had been to the girls' school run by the French and

## EL GOLBA

could read and write, and her father, Salih said, was a wealthy man who owned a thousand palm trees. *Purdah* is strict and the women rarely go out. Their dress was rather similar to the fashion of the Du'an province of the Hadhramaut—a loose three-quarter length garment with rather a low neck and coloured patches sewn on to a dark foundation, and, as in South Arabia, their hair was plaited and covered by a veil. Biya wore several bracelets and necklaces, and a ring bearing a heart. The old slave woman, whom Margaret described as very cheery but ugly as sin, was dressed in some shapeless red clothes. Margaret had been shy to go on account of her lack of Arabic, but she enjoyed herself in spite of the flies, always more evident to a newcomer.

M. Wasmer advised against our starting too early in the morning, suggesting that we should leave late and aim no further than Fort Miribel. Everybody thought that we travelled much faster than we did, but we thought it wiser to go slowly, examining the tyre pressure at frequent intervals, and avoiding the holes in the road. As a compromise we started off about ten, heavily laden by the addition of Kassou, and supplies of water and petrol. Kassou was wrapped in a voluminous woollen 'aba. It made one feel hot to look at it and added considerably to his by no means slight girth. Those who sat with him were not only more squashed than usual but also appreciably hotter. M. Wasmer was uneasy about our weight, for although we had been assured that the car could carry twenty-six cwt, and we were several hundred pounds under that, he did not think that in the Sahara it should carry more than 750 kilogrammes.

I saw little of the sights of El Golea though the ancient fortress of Al Qala, from which it takes its name, was conspicuous. It is now no more than a heap of dried mud, but this does not mean that the site is not very ancient, for the Arabs constantly rebuild their castles on the tumbled down mud of the old ones. It is said that there once ruled in this castle a queen of the Zenatas, a tribe of nomadic Berbers who came from the east via Cyrène. The Zenatas are credited with having introduced the camel into the Sahara in Roman times. Their later capital was Tlemcen and they were ultimately conquered by the Almoravids. Legend has it that Al Qala, the fortress, was captured by Sha'amba Arabs about 400 A.D.

## A PLANNED OASIS

El Golea is certainly a beautiful oasis, but to me it had little of the picturesqueness and historic beauty of Ghardaia, and I could have matched it with many an oasis in South Arabia and out-matched it with a dozen. It is the French who have made El Golea the lovely desert garden city that it is with artesian wells, and in that way it is a marvel and a model of what can be done to make the desert bloom. In many ways it reminded me of Al Qurn, the garden city suburb of Seiyun in the Hadhramaut. The comparison interested me because El Golea showed what European planning of an unplanned Arab oasis might be.

## Chapter VI

### "BEAU GESTE" OASES

*These high wild hills and rough uneven ways  
Draw out our miles and make them wearisome;*

SHAKESPEARE.

*That desert is haunted by demons, if the takshif be alone, they make sport of him and disorder his mind, so that he loses his way and perishes. For there is no visible road or track in these parts—nothing but sand blown hither and thither by the wind. You see hills of sand in one place, and afterwards you will see them moved to quite another place.*

IBN BATTUTA.

AFTER we had left the oasis for the empty, uninhabited wastes again, the way became even more featureless and barren than it had been before. The road led through ground which would certainly be a salty marsh when rain fell, climbing up afterwards on to the barren jōls, an endless stony plateau with a great pink bank of distant sand, part of the great eastern Erg or sand dune.

Here and there a sand devil blew up, whirling strangely along in the still heat. Kassou drew our attention to them thinking they were something new to us. Here, as in the Hadhramaut, they are thought to be jinns. Hitherto I had always shared this feeling of there being something large and sinister about the jinns of the sand. Presently, however, we saw a little circle of tiny dancing devils, but Elizabeth called them dust fairies, and exclaimed "Aren't they sweet?" This was a new and much more attractive way of looking at the desert sprites. But there is much mischief in them and every now and then we found a dune neatly piled right across the road. Surely they had put it there. But there must have been some good sprites too for occasionally we found a sandy patch showing where a dune had been moved from the road to its side. Kassou knew of a place where lately a dune, that had been over the road, had kindly moved to one side.

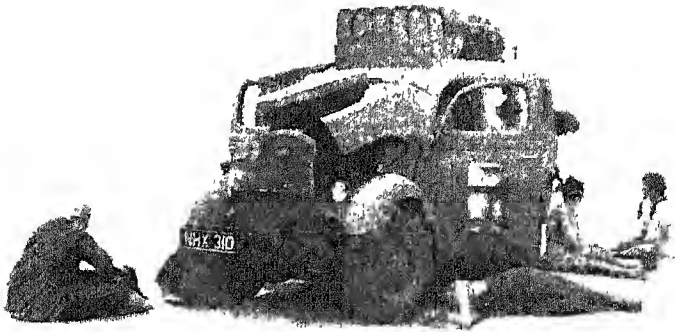
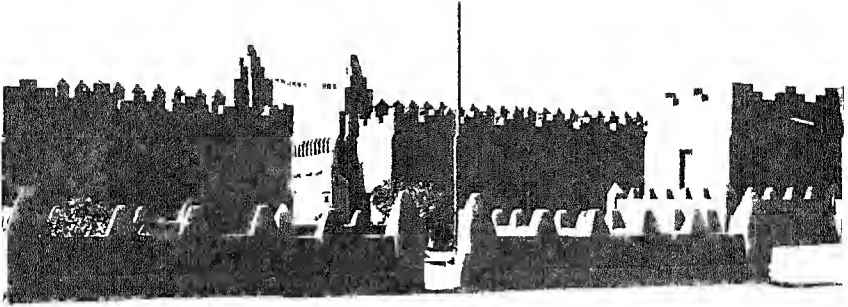


THE KING OF ALL THE WORLD AND HIS COURT



THE SUQ AT GHARDAIA  
BENI ISGEN



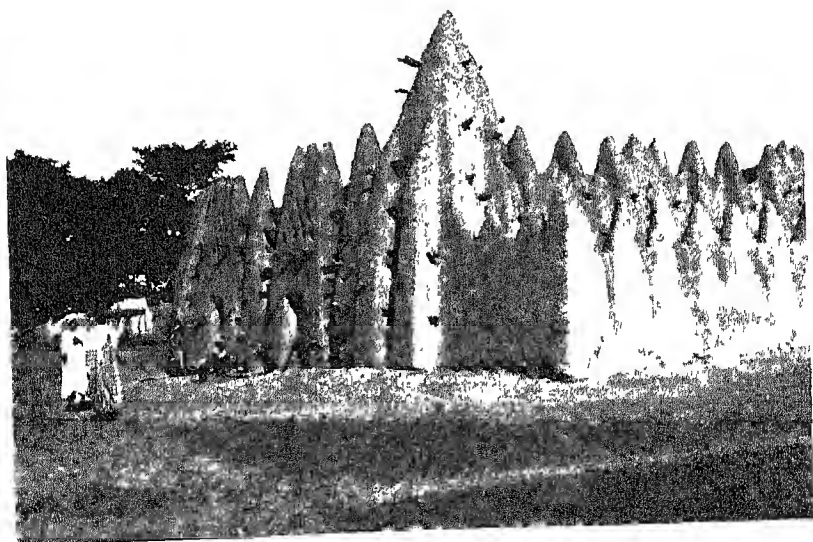


TAMANRASSET

IN SUCH SHADE AS THE CAR COULD AFFORD



TUAREG AT IN ABANGARIT. THE END OF THE SAHARA  
BY THE WELL OF RUNZI



GRANARIES LIKE GREAT WATER POTS

THE ARCHITECTURE OF WA



THE CHIEF'S COMPOUND AND FAMILY



THE CHIEF OF CHANA



A VOLTA FISHING VILLAGE



ON THE SHORE OF THE GULF OF GUINEA

## A DISQUIETING INCIDENT

As we went from one level up to another of these endless plateaux the mirages also played strange tricks. Camels, when we saw them, looked like large thistleheads on bare stalks and trees paddled in the mirage pools. The piles of stones along the track were ceaselessly plodding caravans. Refraction causes many an illusion in the desert, but although one recognizes mirages for being the lying promises that they are it is possible to find much in them on which the imagination may linger, beguiling the weariness of the way. Deep in these fancies, they became real, even cool and refreshing. There was a coolness in them like that of the water brook the hart desires.

At noon we reached Timimoun Corner, a large concrete sign alone in a waste of stones. There was no sort of shade but Kassou said we should find some about twenty kilometres ahead. Alas for the resolution I had made not to drive on in the heat beyond twelve but always to stop until three. It was not quite half-past twelve when, with a loud report, a tyre burst, and we had now no change of tyre at all except the one which Bou Kamel had so kindly prepared for use as a last emergency. It was a sobering and rather disquieting event for tyres are scarce in Algiers, let alone in the desert. Indeed, in England itself I had not been able to leave with more than one. So we stopped there for three hours in the heat, changed the wheel and lunched, and in half an hour we reached the good shade trees of the Wadi Ras al Erg.

We were travelling alongside the great dune known as the Erg beni Shauli, and that is the most comfortable way of appreciating a big dune. There can hardly be a more lovely sight than the pink and rosy hues of Saharan or Rub 'al Khali sand dunes at almost any time of the day, though the shadows of early morning and evening add most to their beauty. They seem to possess so much of the loveliness of the curves and colours of youth. I have had among them most refreshing sleep and I know of no sight I would more happily see. But I doubt whether, except perhaps among the icebergs of the Polar regions, there is any more frightening part of the earth's surface to journey over than an endless series of dunes. My own personal experience of them is limited to no more than a twenty-hour camel ride across them, and motoring over them for short distances. Despite the heat and the oppressive thirst I should not

## “BEAU GESTE” OASES

again mind crossing them with trusty beduins and good camels, but too close contact with them in a heavily laden car in the wastes of the Sahara is a thing I should prefer to avoid. It was half-past four when we saw the end of the dune as we climbed up to a higher jöl, and Kassou told us we should see no more until we reached In Salah.

The kindly, brief twilight had come to an end and night with its moon was upon us when we reached Fort Miribel in the Wadi Shebaba. We had only travelled seven hundred miles from Algiers and we had so many many more to go, but Fort Miribel, in the lonely Wadi Shebaba, seemed far from anywhere and as distant an outpost as one could well imagine. There in the lonely night I found no difficulty in peopling it with the ghosts of the Foreign Legion and almost expected a challenge from its walls. I am told that the Legion were there at a time, though I would not state authoritatively that it was so, but it was just the sort of solitary desert fort of the Beau Geste kind in which one would expect them to have been, and I thought of the cafard from which those adventurous souls from many a land must have suffered in this distant desert spot. At any rate, whether or not the Foreign Legion were there it was certainly a garrison post and it bore the inscription:

12 Janvier } 1894  
 7 Avril }  
 2e Genie Cie 12-4  
 Cie 17-4  
 2e Bon D'Afrique 4e Cie

Now, however, it had fallen from its previous estate and bugles no longer echoed from its walls. It was just a borj on the piste where travellers sometimes stopped to have a meal or even, as we did, to spend a night. It is not really a comfortable borj like Hassi Fahal for it had vaulted roofs to which you could not climb and sleep, and it was dirty and uncared for. The officers' mess room was blackened with smoke and the whole fort had a certain tumbledown air. In fact it would have tumbled down had it not been that the desert in some queer way preserves ancient monuments of stone much better than do temperate climes. It recalled to me a not dissimilar building, the barracks of the Tenth Legion in Transjordan, still standing alone



and deserted for two thousand years and still called Leijun. What a romance there is, if it has not already been written, in the story of the garrisoning by European posts of the Arab deserts! The pacification by the French of the Sahara belongs to modern times, but it is a great story all too little known by us.

Rather disconsolate and worried by the event of the day we dined and slept among the ghosts of Fort Miribel. In the night there came two lorries from the south and one which M. Wasmer had sent to Tamanrasset which was to act as our support. Not knowing what better to do I wrote him a note telling of our misfortune, and asking whether he could ask his office in Algiers to try and get some tyres sent to us either from the north or preferably, as we would meet them on the way, from the south.

We slipped away from the Fort at half-past four with the moon still shining, determined to take all the care we possibly could of the four tyres left to us, for a further burst would leave us marooned. On the hot scorching paths of the Sahara tyres have a better chance of survival in the cool of the night and in the early morning, and from now on, rather to Kassou's amusement, we checked the pressure pretty nearly every twenty kilometres.

Most of our morning was spent in crossing the desolate plateau of Tademait, though Kassou would not have it that the map was right in calling the whole plateau Tademait, and we had travelled across fifty miles of it before he conceded that it had begun, saying that the previous part was known as Tabalula. Now and then we crossed a shallow wadi such as Terbuka, but this was very infrequent and the jöl seemed absolutely endless. The word jöl is unknown in the Sahara where Kassou called it *hedeb*, and the generic term is *raj*. The only difference I could see between the raj of the Sahara and the jöl of the Hadhramaut was that the former was not broken up by precipitous-sided wadis like those of the Hadhramaut. The gorges of Arak were just like the wadis of Hadhramaut but Wadi Arak was the only one of its kind we saw.

The great difference between the two countries is that in the Sahara the distances are far vaster. Motoring in the Hadhramaut is comparatively a new phenomenon and motoring has adopted the language of camels. We say, for instance, it is so many hours to such and

such a place, whereas in the Sahara every driver knows how many kilometres it is from oasis to oasis, or well to well. Whereas in Arabia you think in hundreds of miles from centre to centre, in Africa the unit is thousands. Water is even more scarce, except in the Rub 'al Khali, and centres of population are far more widely separated.

The landscape, said Margaret, did nothing to cheer us, being desolate in the extreme—a vast plain covered with stones. There was no colour and no shade anywhere. She wrote:

“I even missed the sand dunes of yesterday which are a rather beautiful yellow ochre colour. It is strange how one appreciates any colour at all in the Sahara. That is why the evening is so welcome, for the sky is always the most wonderful shades, though not, I think, any more beautiful than sunsets in Angus. All day I longed for a sight of Loch Lintraithen on an early autumn evening, breath-taking in its cool beauty.”

“Leila’s eye began to discharge in the morning so I took her on my knee and we both tried to sleep. I was too aware of aches and pains to be successful, and I am ashamed to say that the only time I did drop off was when I was amusing myself thinking of wonderful things to eat. The pleasant part of that game was that I could eat everything I liked, one after the other, without ever reaching satiety.”

Hour on hour the turnless track rolled under us. The endless caravans at its side stretched into the far distance, plodding, plodding till as we caught them up they turned again to piles of stones. The hot dust lying still before us was churned to a fiery, choking cloud as we passed over it. I could see it in the driving mirror, rising high behind us in pursuing fury. It was, I knew, a pillar to be seen afar and perhaps more evident to any who might see it than that which led the Israelites out of Egypt.

Talk was impossible. I sat in my arm-chair, my route book and my map were hot and heavy on my legs perspiring under them. My shirt and trousers pressed against the cushions, sweatily sticking to them. My mouth was tight shut, my eyes open only a slit. The dust came up and up into the car. I felt it settle, settle on my face, saw it grow thick on hands and book and map. I would not move for moving only made the sweat and dust worse. I would not breathe more for that only choked more.

## THE TIRESOME TRACK OF TADEMAIT

Dust, dust, dust. Dusty and dry, dead and desolate desert.

"Son of man, can these dry bones live."

Rolling raj. That's what they call it. The car rolls, rattles, roars, rumbles.

Heat, hot air, hot dust. Hot as hell. Heat haze.

Shimmering sand. Sun, stones, sharp stones, swcat, shaking.

"His breast was bare, his matted hair was buried in the sand."

Slave's dream.

"The Blast of the Desert."

Blast! Cigarettes falling down. Why don't they put something to stop things shaking out of this recess? Another fifty cairns and I will smoke again.

Ten miles done. Pencil out.

"1008 hrs. 2220 miles. Check tyres."

Time for cigarette. Hot, dry, Algerian cigarette. Tobacco all falling out.

"Stop 1042 } Check tyres. All 33.  
1045 } 2230. Liz driving."

Doreen had been driving since 0850. She changes places with Elizabeth while Kassou checks the tyres. We start again.

Another cigarette. "Me too, please," from Elizabeth.

"1115. 2241. South end of Tademaït Plateau. Top of Aqaba."

That was the end of that. Forty-five miles of Tademaït according to Kassou's reckoning, or ninety-five in all. Six or seven hours of grinding, stifling discomfort as one small sample of days of it.

If he reads too much descriptive detail of a road like this, a reader rapidly tires. He is I suppose resting comfortably in an armchair and wants to be taken to his journey's end with a continued interest. Yet if he is to know the country the writer must pilot him along the route as he travelled it himself. If there is monotony he must make him share it. There *are* miles and miles of dusty, bumpy tracks with never a turn and never a rise or fall. There *are* endless flat jōls with not a hill in sight and only a flat horizon. There *are* stones and again more stones. Most undoubtedly there are people, perhaps a majority, who find this monotonous and are bored with it when they travel it. Yet if you cross the Sahara, whether you are bored or not, this

has to be passed, and the arm-chair traveller must share the dust, the heat and the boredom with you.

I think grim travel like this has its virtues. It disciplines the body, it cannot check the mind even if you only think, like Margaret did, of wonderful things to eat—and, one may add, to drink. And, really, odd though it may seem, there is an interest in country like this, even if only to see the thin red line on the green map unfold itself in a rough and dusty track on a grey, and boundless stonc-strewn jöl.

The Aqaba was reminiscent of those of the Hadhramaut, though far better graded. Away in the distance stood four steep flat-topped hills like those of Al Abr. At the bottom we stopped for lunch in the Wadi Ain El Hajaj, where there were a few samr trees, many flies and little shade. Samr, or more probably geradh, for it has ycllow blooms like mimosa, is here called *tallh*, and the bark is used for tanning in the same way.

We drove along the wadi for some distance and again came to sand. There were white patches at the side of the road to help aircraft to follow the tracks, and at about half-past three we reached a little camp of five bell-tents where a small party of sappers were engaged on repairing the road from In Salah. Kassou and the lorry drivers wanted to stop and talk, so we willingly agreed and were invited by the officers to have coffce. It was a pleasant break, and we could well afford the time, for barring accidents with some patches of sand ahead, which we had been promised, we were not far from In Salah.

There were lengths of fairly soft sand over which we travelled at considerable speed, though even so we had one short ensablément. Soon we came to another 'aqaba, known as La Vingting as it was only twenty-five kilometres from In Salah. As we went down we saw in the distance the little green oasis of Al Sahila, and to east of it a weli's tomb and some loncly houses. Kassou used both the word weli and marabout for the tombs of the saints we saw. This was the beginning of In Salah, an oasis lying in the midst of a vast flat plain of sand out of which here and there stood curious clay formations suggesting some long bygone dwellings. They recalled to me the ruins of the ancient Himyarites in the sands of South Arabia,

known to the beduins as the homes of the sons of Ad, and curiously enough Kassou said that this place was known as Erg Sidi Musa, or the dune of Lord Moses. In some way Arab legend has transported the prophet Moses to the Sahara, just as throughout Arabia you find tombs and sites of prophets and patriarchs such as Job and Salah.

It was nearly sunset when we reached the little walled town of the garrison of In Salah. It looked very much of a Beau Geste site for the desert sands swept up to its walls like a yellow sea. Though Kassou told us we had to drive round to the Bab al Biru, the gate of the road to the old caravan centre of Biru or Walata two hundred miles north-west of Timbuktu, the guard there sent us back to the Bab Algir, the Algiers gate, and we drove into the courtyard round the hotel, where we found a lorry and a car of English trekkers and first made the acquaintance of the Landing family, father, mother, daughter and two small boys, travelling in an ex-R.A.F. wireless truck to the Cape, and Burnaby and Maxwell travelling in a 8 h.p. Jowitt truck and covering the story of the route for the B.B.C. From now until the neighbourhood of Zinder we were often meeting or travelling with them and they were old friends by the time we parted. The Landing family confessed that Sheila was their inspiration in making the journey. At school she had formed pen friends with children in South Africa. With these as their only contacts and tired of the promises and prospects of post-war England, they had, like all the other trekkers on the route, set out on this great journey over desert, through forests and mountains to South Africa to start a new life. Maxwell told me that most trekkers left England because they could not settle down after the war. Many had seen South Africa and thought there was no place like it.

One could not but admire the spirit which moved them to make this tremendous journey. This emigration down the length of Africa is due to the shortage of passages by sea and air, for which you may have to wait anything from a year to two, but there was something tremendous in it, even if one had to regret that England was losing so many useful citizens. It was a phenomenon like that of the Voortrekkers or the Overlanders. Some French put the estimate of English crossing the desert as high as ten thousand, and about the lowest figure I heard was three thousand, though the only figures I

saw were at El Golea which showed some thirty lorries passing through in a month, probably with an average of about five or six people to each. The sad thing about it all was that so many seemed to have started out with quite inadequate resources in transport, money and food. I know myself of the difficulties we had in England in getting any sort of really trustworthy information for, with the exception of the Shell, nobody knew very much about the journey or what sort of equipment and money was necessary.

We were travelling under the best auspices. I had the blessing of the Colonial Office, and the facilities promised by the Governments General of Algeria and French West Africa turned out in actual fulfillment to be far greater than anything I had expected. Nevertheless, we had difficulty in England in obtaining even part of the equipment we needed, for there was everywhere a shortage of all those things necessary for such a journey, and, as I have recounted, licences and permits innumerable had to be obtained. It was not until we reached Algiers that we really got authoritative information. That we were doing as well as we were was largely due to the care that wonderful organization the *Société Africaine des Transports Tropicaux* had bestowed upon us. Colonel Nabal and M. Hubert of the Shell had direct experience of the desert route, so of course had M. Estienne, though there were many others who knew of it only by hearsay. Even Captain de Malglaive had never travelled that way, and the Consul General and his staff, though they were much concerned with the emigrants, for whom they did everything possible, knew nothing of the real difficulties of the road.

We heard on all sides of how ill-informed many trekkers were. At the S.A.T.T. offices I was told of one party whose only map was a school one of Africa with one line drawn from Algiers to Kano and one from Kano to the Cape. Doreen was told by one traveller that she had thrown out all her flour as she had thought there were bakeries all along the route!

It was the Landings and Burnaby of whom we saw most, but occasionally we came across others, a party for instance who had moved into the Hôtel de France at Bouzareaa as we moved out, arrived at In Salah the day after we did, and we saw them again at Tamanrasset and In Gezzam where they followed closely in our footsteps,

#### AIR MARSHAL'S TRAVEL DE LUXE

arriving at Zinder before us. We saw no more of the party of eight who had crossed over in the *Ville d'Oran*, though we heard that they had broken down irretrievably in the early stages of the desert crossing. We saw no more of the party which had camped outside the hotel at Laghuat, and it was a large party too. We followed at some distance in the tracks of an Air Vice-Marshal of whom I had heard in London, travelling *de luxe* in a caravan with a frigidaire and cooking range. We never met him though finally we arrived at Agades on the day on which he had left.

Up and down the desert news was swopped of these various bands of trekkers. How many broke down eventually, and how many have got through all the way I do not know, but it does seem necessary that there should be someone in England with authoritative information who can say precisely what type of vehicle is necessary to make the desert crossing in safety, what the facilities on the journey are and even how much money is necessary for it.

## Chapter VII

### WE REACH THE LAND OF THE VEILED PEOPLE

*Ten days after leaving this point we came to the country of Haggar, who are a tribe of Berbers; they wear face veils and are a rascally lot. . . . We continued to travel through the country of Haggar for a month; it has few plants, is very stony, and the road through it is bad.*

IBN BATTUTA.

SQUALID is about the only word that can be used to describe the hotel at In Salah. Gone were the days when these southern hotels could boast of being luxury resorts of every comfort in these widely separated little oases of the southern Sahara. The patron's substantive post was that of garage manager and for that job, as a mechanic, he was admirably suited, but neither he nor his wife were 'hoteliers' and the work of the hotel was mainly left to an amiable but dirty collection of cooks and boys. Our bedrooms were good enough in their way, though dusty, but we were not inclined to cavil at that for there was water, and we were able to wash away again the layers of sand which we had gathered since leaving El Golca. But the meals, badly cooked, badly served, and altogether revolting, drove away the fugitive hunger which is only attracted in such places by clean and simple food.

We slept well and late, not intending to leave before the afternoon on what is now a seven hundred and twenty kilometre stage to Tamanrasset, for Arak at three hundred, once also with a well organized hotel, has now nothing but the empty buildings falling to ruin in charge of an Arab 'gardien.' There were various things to do with the car, and when I came out to the garage a load of worry slid from me on hearing from Kassou that M. Wasmer had sent two tyres and that there was a letter with them. The latter was kindness itself in its obviously heartfelt distress at our trouble, and it was full of good advice and news of steps he had taken to help us. Wires had



gone to Algiers and to Zinder and he had sent two tyres, both of them old and second-hand but still with serviceable points, and both of them the loan of Captain Lo. Here indeed was more evidence of the traditional generosity, hospitality and succour the traveller meets in the desert, the natural heritage of the Arab which the French have acquired and added to all the graces of their race.

During the morning I went to call on Captain Le Liépvre, the Chef de Poste. I had already met one of his N.C.Os. the night before, and he himself had been to look for me when I was washing after our arrival. How easy in these far distant corners of the Sahara it would be for officers and men in small detachments to be slack, but their appearance was always smart. Captain Le Liépvre's office was pleasant, simply furnished, shady, and the model of what a desert office should be. He himself was dressed in an immaculate white bush shirt and the black silk Zouave trousers which are a part of the undress uniform of the desert.

No more than a few minutes conversation with him was sufficient to learn that here was one who loved the desert and its folk most deeply, and knew, studied, and endeavoured to fulfil their needs. He talked of the desert service, and told me how they preferred bachelors, as wives tended to keep young officers away from their touring and their duty. He said that all the desert officers had come back to their posts from the war, refusing other and more attractive offers. He spoke for long of how the desert was administered. He expressed a fear of encroaching politics, creeping in insidiously from the north. I asked many questions based on my own Arab knowledge, and at the end I said that I thought we had much to learn from the French in matters of desert administration.

"On the contrary," he said, "you have Lawrence, and there isn't one of us in the desert service who has not read and does not consult *Les Sept Piliers de la Sagesse*. In it is the answer to every question of how to treat with Arabs. When I go on tour there are but two books I carry, the Bible, and the *Sept Piliers de la Sagesse*."

Before I left he kindly drafted a further telegram to Zinder, asking that everything possible should be done to send tyres to meet me on the way. He was very ashamed of the hotel, and told me it was a military building leased to the S.A.T.T. for a franc a year on condition

## WE REACH THE LAND OF THE VEILED PEOPLE

that they ran a good hotel. But he said he believed that the S.A.T.T. had ceased to take an interest, caring only for the air.

He asked me a lot of questions about the trekkers as he was anxious to do what he could to help them. He said he had thoughts of building a 'campement' for them and providing water and wood. He was afraid a good many of them had a rough time as they hadn't much money and there was little in an oasis like In Salah which he could provide for them. What a lot we owe to people like that for their care of our fellow countrymen, but it was all in the true desert spirit.

I did not know when I met Le Liépvre that I was talking to one of the great figures of the day. I only learnt this from admiring comments by his colleagues and juniors elsewhere. A "chic type" they called him, which indeed he was, but much more than that. He knows, they say, the Sahara from the confines of Morocco to Tripolitania, and from the north to the borders of the Sudan. He has travelled it not so much by car as by camel. He keeps his own camels and horses to which he is greatly attached, and spends more time in saddle than in office. It is a grand life, he declares, if only for the fact that one is one's own master. His colonel he rarely sees, and once a year or so a general may drop down from the sky; a good lunch, a good dinner, and he is gone. I am told he spent his last leave descending the Niger from source to mouth alone in a small canoe. He is a true descendant of those great French pioneers of the Sahara.

Behind the picturesque Beau Geste architecture of military In Salah lies the old town, the capital of Tuat and from old time an important caravan centre. On it converged great trade routes from Fez, Constantine and Kairwan and from it south-bound routes radiated to Murzuk, to Air and to Timbuktu. Its size increased in the closing years of the eighteenth century, when much of the trade that had previously gone to Abuam in Tafilalt came to it. It was for long a closed city to which westerners dared hardly penetrate and when, in 1825, the gallant Scots explorer, Laing, reached In Salah from Tripoli he would scarcely have got out of it alive had it not been for the help of a young Targi of influence, Sidi 'Uthman bin Hajbakri, who forwarded his journey towards Timbuktu which he reached,

## WITCHES' HATS

only to be murdered by his escort. It is interesting to note how many European explorers started to solve the riddle of the Niger and of Timbuktu through the Sahara. They include the great German explorer Barth, who travelled under British auspices.

Loaded up with petrol and with the lorry carrying not only a good deal of our surplus luggage but extra petrol, because there was none at Arak, we left the Bab al Biru shortly after four o'clock on Sunday the 9th of March, and taking the Tamanrasset track marked, a short distance back along the road of yesterday, by a signpost, we drove for forty miles over the great flat wilderness of sand in which In Salah lies. Of features there were practically none. One was almost tempted to record each of the white posts marking the track. It was fortunate that they were there for without them it would have been fatally easy to get lost in this dry waste of sand without a blade of grass or bush, where every square mile is exactly like the last, and where even the gazelles die of thirst, for we saw their skulls and skeletons, sometimes skin clad, bleaching or half buried in the sand.

Towards the end of this long stretch, as evening fell we came upon a few outcrops of clay and rock. The white posts ended, but there were still a few of the curious black conical iron signs put down by the Citroen expedition. The first of these we had seen looked like a witch's hat dropped in the desert, and so the children thought it, but by now they had ceased to believe that so many witches scudding across the Saharan night on broomsticks could have dropped so many black hats along the road. We drove on through the night, thinking first to stop at the well or *hassi* called Krenig, where Kassou pointed out the only sort of a shelter on the way. We tried further on to camp but there was no shelter or fuel, and the wind made it impossible to light a Primus. Kassou promised us fuel later on and at a quarter past ten we came to a wadi bed, in which grew scrub and grass. Here we left the road and camped under the shelter of a great rock on the hillside. This, as it so turned out, must have been about the place called Takula where the Draper Mission camped on its way to Tamanrasset in 1927. It was the first vegetation since leaving In Salah, now ninety miles behind us.

We were on our way again by a quarter past six next morning,

## WE REACH THE LAND OF THE VEILED PEOPLE

coming towards the top of an 'aqaba from which we saw views of distant mountains which improved as we advanced. There was a pyramid marking the lonely grave of a Frenchman. All Kassou knew about him was that he had fallen ill on the road and died a long time ago. Here, now and then, we saw a thorn tree and signs of just a little more life began to appear. In one patch of samr trees we saw an eagle owl perched on the top of a tree. One felt the poor creature could hardly be satisfied with such a perch, but certainly there was no other available in the neighbourhood. It was the largest bird we had seen so far, and indeed we had not noticed a great deal of animal life. Here and there a gazelle, and the night before a jerboa had crossed in front of our car. Sometimes no doubt the nomad Arabs of the Sha'amba tread these wastes, for we passed a beduin cemetery. Here, as in Arabia, it requires three stones to hold a woman in her grave compared with the two which mark the man's.

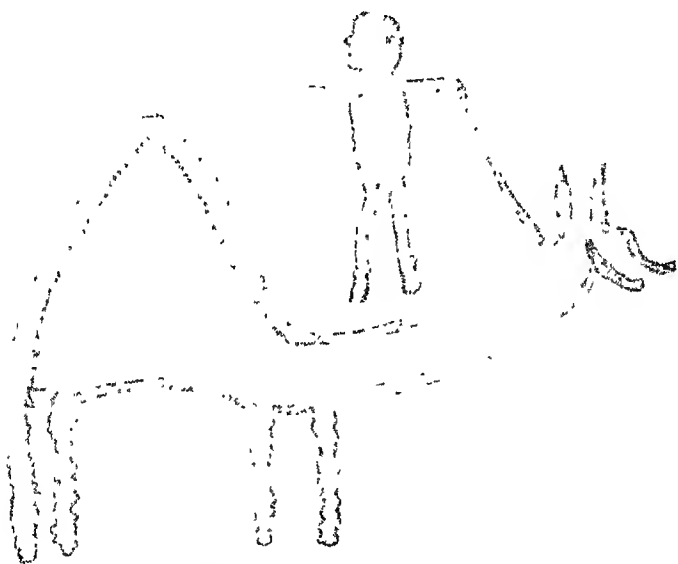
A hundred and thirty-three miles from In Salah we came to an end of the Arab lands. This was clear enough from the map, where Arab names and prefixes such as 'Jebel' (mountain) changed and became Targi, such as 'Adrar' (mountain). A few minutes after entering the Wadi Tiratclmin, where the country of the Tuareg starts, we stopped to look at a vast collection of inscriptions cut on the rock. These were in the Tiffina script and were most reminiscent of similar groups of pecked inscriptions on the flat rocks of the incense route or in Socotra. The similarity of certain characters with Himyaritic may be coincidental, but what was of extreme interest to me was to notice the number of pecked representations of feet, and some sandals. These I had seen in Socotra, in the Hadhramaut, and on a Greek tombstone in the Cairo Museum, and their significance I have never yet been able to discover. There were some quite spirited drawings of camels, one or two particularly good, showing a camel being led by a beduin.

Thirty miles later we came upon a little emerald patch in this empty landscape, the borj of Tadjmut, where the 'gardien' who saluted us as we sped by obviously made the most of the water in the well for the garden glowed with vivid colour from afar and looked well stocked.

## AN ABANDONED DESERT HOTEL

In the midst of the landing ground in the wide flat sandy bed of the Wadi Arak we caught up again with the Landings and Burnaby. The gorges of Arak were striking, perpendicular-sided wadis with banks of scree. Round a corner a minute or two later we came in sight of the borj, with down below it the refreshing sight of a great reedy pool in which fishes of eatable size flourish, just as they do in that strange pool in the Wadi Maseila near Tarim.

The borj of Arak, which has a stone tablet outside the wall of the dining-room recording in gilded letters that it was the borj of Docteur



CAMEL WITH DRIVER

Flamand, was pathetic in its uncared-for desolation; the beds and washstands have fallen to ruin, the bar is there like a ghost, with here and there an empty bottle still standing on it. Dust lay thick, but we enjoyed the lunch we made there, the gallons of tea we drank, and the wash we managed to have in one of the deserted bedrooms.

There are no drinks like tea and cold water in the desert, but tea must always I think take pride of place. Hot tea with milk and sugar is the most refreshing thing in the exhausting heat. The tea

## WE REACH THE LAND OF THE VEILED PEOPLE

itself is a stimulant, the sugar strengthening and the milk of real value. All through the Hadhramaut I used to carry round a little green canvas bucket in which were my requisites for making tea, and possibly some small emergency food supply. This was always ready for use wherever water was available. I could wash in the bucket and by the time I had done so my beduin orderly would have tea ready in my blue enamel mug, which accompanied me to Germany and was now with me through the Sahara.

The seil bed up which we continued after leaving the borj was full of familiar trees, 'ithl (tamarisk) and 'ushar (dead sea fruit) among them, and Kassou told me that here too 'ushar is used for making gunpowder. Amongst the vegetation a Targi shepherdess, black-cloaked like the Hadhrami beduin women, tended goats which here too at times we saw perched in the trees. The road wandered in a familiar way from side to side of the wadi. It was in good repair, though Kassou told us that when the seils pass down it was soon washed away.

Twenty-two miles brought us to the head of the wadi, where another stretch of sandy desert glowed like coral and amethyst in the evening light, studded here and there with pointed hills of no great height. It was dark when we stopped at half-past six in a great grove of tamarisk trees. We supped and slept in their shelter, lying in a long row on the clean, soft sand. In the distance the flames of a beduin fire leapt high, stabbing the body of the night. We heard hyænas in the distance.

We were off again just after four, getting stuck in the sand soon after, and a little later we passed the dark and silent caravans of the Landings and Burnaby by the roadside. There was little enough that we could see, though here and there one was conscious of hillocks and pointed hills in the neighbourhood. Dawn crept cautiously from the dark as though not to disturb its stilly quiet, and in the dim, chill light rocks emerged silent and ghost-like from a dead world. Some of these queer great stones had fantastic shapes like actual or mythical animals or half humans. They often stood in groups, as though discussing primeval politics in a bygone world of the shades. At dawn they seemed alive and vaguely fearsome, but froze to harmless immobility as the hand of day touched them.

## INVOKING A SAINT'S AID

The night and these curious rocks inspired Margaret to verse:

### VENI MECUM

"I would tell you of the tawny desert strewn  
With shattered dreams in shards upon the sand,  
Of rocks like tortured Pietas rough-hewn  
In wind-grieved crust by some gigantic hand;  
And oh, the stars that span the brow of night,  
That pierce the quivering soul one instant, tense  
On wings spread anguished in their utmost flight  
Transfixed in mild, ecstatic impotence."

With the light we found ourselves in good old desert scenery, sand and hills, mauve in the dawn's cold light, and it was in this scenery that our speedometer registered half our estimated mileage to Tamale from Uphousden. As the glowing sun took its first bound above the horizon we reached the well of Tesnu, and there Kassou made us stop, for here is the tomb of the weli Moulai al Ahsan. Disaster, he said, was sure to overtake those who did not stop to pray to the saint for a safe passage. This was an act with which I was in full sympathy, for, as I have said, our successful passage rested in hands other than ours. Ever since we had started Margaret had invoked the aid of saints, particularly St. Christopher, for the success of our journey, and was I think rather worried that we carried no medallion of him in the car. She had appealed also to St. Christopher to keep the dust out of the car, but this, I am afraid, was beyond him. Kassou stood in earnest supplication on our behalf, and I was glad enough that any saints, Muslim or Christian, should be invoked to add their prayers to ours for a safe crossing.

Now we entered a field of black basalt slag heaps, and before long came up with some camels whose tracks we had been following for a long way. It was unusual for us to see camel tracks, for so often in deserts camels follow routes impassable to cars. It was ten o'clock, when, after driving a long way round the flanks of a mountain, we came to the borj of In Ekker. In the early days of the history of this track this was a principal stopping place for the buses, but it has long fallen from its high estate, though its shade still gives welcome rest and its well refreshment to those who wish to break their journey.

## WE REACH THE LAND OF THE VEILED PEOPLE

The kindly 'gardien' brought us a little bunch of radishes from his green patch of garden.

The heavy heat of midday was not perceptibly less when we left just before three, making for the ranges of the Hoggar dimly rising in the haze. The distances here, as I have said, are so great that even the far-off mountains approached but slowly. Presently, however, monsters of black basalt began to close in on us and we came to the little village of In Amgel in the wadi of that name. Round about the reeded valley on lower places were scattered the simple houses of the first Tuareg we had seen at home, and a village was indeed an event on such a road. In Amgel was the first village since leaving In Salah, three hundred and fifty miles behind, and it was easy to see that ethnologically we were in a new country. The presence of population had marked effect on the quality of the road which now continued good for miles, though on it we reaped a dividend from our careful watch on the tyres by discovering a slow puncture, which necessitated a change of wheel.

There was a good deal of vegetation in the wadis, particularly tamarisk, and here and there, amongst the branches, a Tuareg family had built grass huts. We should have liked to camp on the road but Kassou and the lorry were anxious that we should press on to Tamanrasset, so that we passed through the little village of Tit in the dark and only reached Tamanrasset just before nine. Accommodation was at a premium that night in the little mountain post, 4,480 feet above sea level, for a Minister from Paris with all his attendant satellites had arrived by air, but the cheerful young host of the hotel found us a couple of rooms into which we crowded, and thankfully, after a late supper, fell asleep.



## Chapter VIII

### IN THE HEART OF THE HOGGAR

*Not that they beggared be in mind, or brutes,  
That they have chosen a dwelling-place afar  
In lonely places: but their eyes are turned  
To the high stars, the very deep of Truth.  
Freedom they seek, an emptiness apart  
From worthless hopes: din of the market place  
And all the noisy crowding up of things,  
And whatsoever wars on the Divine,  
At Christ's command and for His love, they hate.*

PAULINUS OF NOLA

TAMANRASSET is a purely artificial town built as a military and administrative post in striking red mud, with architecture as bizarre as that of In Salah. We were at the highest point of the Hoggar Massif which we should reach. Its summit is invisible from any point on the road.

When I went to the S.A.T.T. garage in the morning, Kassou was already at work. I met the patron, M. Bosquée, who showed that he too shared and contributed to the S.A.T.T. tradition of willing, courteous help to the traveller. At first he was a bit on the defensive. I think he had been browned off by over-exacting trekkers, but we soon got over that. It was while I was with him that I heard that the Commandant, Captain Morales, had been to greet me, so I found my way to his office and was there introduced to the local Tuareg chief, the Sultan as he was described to me. He was a tall, stout and imposing figure, much wrapped in robes of indigo dyed cloth, and hung about with amulets and arms. The Tuareg greatly favoured this dyed indigo cloth of the same manufacture as that which is used by the Hadhramaut beduins, for originally it all came from India and comes into the country through Nigerian markets. Like the South Arabian beduins they value it for the fact that the indigo comes off

on their bodies and gives them protection from heat and cold. It is now unfortunately in short supply in Nigeria.

Captain Morales introduced his 'adjoint' to me, Lieutenant Césarini, a young Corsican who had been only two months in the Sahara. He kindly invited Doreen and myself to lunch in the mess, and came to look for us shortly after mid-day. We walked with him along the avenue of tamarisk trees, through whose feathery branches the sun soaked, giving no more than a pleasant illusion of shade, and shedding lacy patterns on the ground. In the centre of the avenue were clumps of geraniums and stocks, a touch of bright colour in harmony with the low and castellated red clay of the buildings on each side.

Everything, so Césarini told us, had been built since the 1914-18 war. Previously there was only the borj of Père Foucauld. We asked about the Cottonest monument, the road to which we had passed the previous evening, and were told that he was a Lieutenant who commanded a force in a battle there which ended warfare in this region and pacified the country round, though he himself had fallen.

We met in the road the military doctor, Simonet by name, a pleasant young man, tall and fair, who loves the desert. He and Césarini took us to the officers' mess, a simple mud building with ceilings of tamarisk branches supported by iron girders, over which was laid straw and earth above the straw. The mess was quite the nicest of the small tropical messes I have ever seen. Built in the local red mud its interior decorations were simple and of the country, a frieze of black figures, a skilful application of local arts and crafts to European use. In the centre of the ante-room stood a little stone fountain, which no doubt helped to relieve the fierce dry air of summer and refresh the eyes of those stationed in this far-off post. There were local rugs, and we sat on couches covered with locally woven cloths drinking a sweet wine before lunch. The meal was almost entirely of local produce. There was a home-made paté with cold lentils mixed with vinegar and celery, a good omelette, meat with peas and caramel pudding. Afterwards we had coffee and a *fine*. It was the nicest Saharan meal we had eaten, and the well-laid table with its pleasant check cloth, so suited to a country where it is for ever summer, made it even more appetising.

## CUSTOMS OF THE TUAREG

There are only five members of the mess, and apart from our host the only one present was the young doctor, who had been in Tamanrasset for two years. He was very interesting and of course knew more about this region than the Lieutenant who was a newcomer. One officer, he said, was always on tour from oasis to oasis. They carried with them flour, tea and sugar only, and slept in the sand. The doctor had a dispensary here but also travelled much on camel amongst the Tuareg, introducing them to the benefits of western medicine. He found a camel more reliable than a car, especially in the hot weather, and told us that in a sixteen kilometre trip he had made in a car he had had three bursts.

The Tuareg dislike being in a house and won't go into a hospital. They have no houses themselves and only the better-off have tents. They are always veiled before strangers, lifting the veil to eat or drink. By contrast the women wear a loose head veil only, which they draw in front of their faces before strangers. Unlike the Arabs, the doctor said, the Tuareg won't eat hare, birds or lizards. He had a great admiration for them, likening them to Frenchmen, and claimed they were absolutely frank and straight, whereas the Arabs intrigued.

The two were interesting about the conditions of the desert service. Every young officer entering it has first to cross some part of the Sahara by camel. In general the service prefers bachelors, as wives are too apt to keep their husbands at home. In the southern areas of Morocco bachelors only are allowed to serve. The doctor, like others, spoke very highly of *Le Liépvre*. He said he won't have married men with him and is, of course, a bachelor himself. Both the young men said that this area is not entirely pacified and that women were therefore better out of it. It was only since the first war that pacification of the Tuareg had gradually taken place.

Tamanrasset is officially known as Fort Laperrine, named after that great Frenchman who had done so much to bring peace to the Sahara. Laperrine was one of the doctor's heroes. He first became noteworthy in Saharan history when in 1900 he was given command of the oases, and was called upon to carry out a campaign against the Tuareg. Having conquered them Laperrine showed his generosity

and statesmanship by opening markets to them and making a tour of their country in order to win their confidence.

I think the following passage from Laperrine's *Notes de route* illustrates well some of his methods and the insight to which he owed his success :

"When I went for a walk I tried to approach the camps and to get into conversation with the children by offering them sugar, but I must admit I did not have much success; I had the same effect on them as if I had been the Devil himself. They ran away as fast as their legs could carry them and vanished into the tents uttering shrill cries like peacocks.

"It may seem strange that I attach such importance to the attitude of children of five to twelve years of age; but when one gets into touch with new peoples the attitude of the children is the mirror of the thoughts of the parents. The latter can hide their true feelings, be respectful, make themselves humble through the force of circumstances, but at the same time chafe at the bit, carry the loathing of the foreigner in their hearts and dream only of the first chance of shaking off the yoke. Children are not so cunning; they listen to their parents talking, and if they run away screaming when they see us, it is because they have not a very favourable opinion of us. But it is through the children that one can get at and train the parents. I have often experimented. It is very difficult for a chief, an officer who is in control, to make advances to a sulky native who keeps away and is only just polite. But, on the other hand, nothing is more amusing and less compromising than to try to win the confidence of the children, to question them and to give them little presents. Their mothers watch you from a distance. When you pass near the tents they smile at you and make some pleasant remark, the father greets you and one day he will wish to see you to thank you for your kindness to his children. The ice is broken. Furthermore, the child represents the future. A tribe where the infants like the French officers, look upon them as good 'papas,' and are delighted to see them in the neighbourhood of the encampments, is a tribe which in ten years will be devoted to France."

Laperrine had the great capacity of attracting the loyalty of all those who met him and worked with him. He gave all his staff his

complete confidence and friendship, but warned them that once he found himself mistaken in them he was finished with them. He understood the country and its people perfectly because he was in sympathy with them, and was known for his courtesy, good humour and generosity.

He died in 1920, after crashing in an aeroplane on his way from Tamanrasset to Tin-Zawaten. In the crash he broke a collar-bone and several ribs, and after wandering for days trying to find their destination he and his companions were compelled to give up the search and return to the wrecked machine. He weakened rapidly and died on the 5th of March. His companions were saved and he was buried at Tamanrasset. Laperrine was to the Sahara what Lyautey was to Morocco, and deserves to be better known as one of the great desert administrators.

The other of the doctor's heroes was the Père Foucauld, whose heart lies buried in Tamanrasset, where the simple borj in which he lived still stands. Père Foucauld, known in religion as Father Charles of Jesus, was a unique character. A nobleman by birth, Vicomte Charles de Foucauld was a French Army officer and explorer before he became a hermit and missionary. He is thus described by Dr. Herisson who knew him well at Tamanrasset:

"Father de Foucauld is small, going grey. His beard is uncared for, there are gaps in his teeth, his hair is cut roughly and unevenly by himself with a pair of scissors, his eyes are bright, his glance keenly intelligent. One felt in him a warmth, an intense mystic flame, the ardour of his all-devouring Faith. He had the look of the prophets, the true believer, a great personality, a spirit independent of others, yet rigorously subjected to his own precepts. Father de Foucauld is undoubtedly one of the race of martyrs who calmly enter the arena to be torn to pieces by lions. . ."

De Foucauld could not unjustifiably be described as fanatic, but he was much more than that. He regularly made meteorological observations at Tamanrasset which were forwarded to the Government at Algiers. He compiled a grammar and vocabulary of the Tamashek language and a collection of Targi poems and proverbs. He was not only a man of religion but a great patriot, devoted to France and to her service. In the lonely heights of the Hoggar

mountains on the plateau of Asekren he built himself in 1901 a tiny hermitage by a little spring, and there he lived alone in the great desert solitudes in communion with nature and with God, for de Foucauld belonged to those who use deserts, even if he did not, or could not, fully use them aright. In 1917 he was murdered by Tuareg just outside his borj in Tamanrasset, and, as the doctor told me, the Taureg have now made him into a saint.

His picture hangs in the hotel, a man with a lean, ascetic, bearded face, who must have shared many of the qualities of that other great African missionary whose heart also lies buried in Africa so far to the south. The French desert administrator seems to criticize the decision of the White Fathers to remove the body of Père Foucauld from Tamanrasset, where he lived and died amongst the people he loved, to El Golea. When they gave up for the time the task of evangelizing the Muslim Sahara, the White Fathers kept El Golea as the most southerly station of their activities, though of course their work is widespread in Sudanic and Bantu Africa.

Père Foucauld did not actually belong to the White Fathers though he was a helper of their Sahara mission. It was my interest in him, and the fact that the White Fathers have a Mission at Navrongo in the Northern Territories, which made me read a history of their work and the record of another noteworthy man, their founder, Cardinal Lavigerie, who died in 1892. A remarkable letter which the Cardinal wrote in 1874 shows that he well appreciated the right approach to the confidence of Muslims. Describing this he says the members (of the Society) adopt all the exterior customs of natives, speak their language, wear the same kind of clothes and eat the same food, following the example of the great apostle who said, "I became all things to all men that I might save all." (I Corinthians ix, 22). He clothed his novices in the white 'gondura' (robe) and 'burnous' (mantle), still worn by all the missionaries of the Society and which has won for them the name of the White Fathers. The headdress is a 'sheshia' (red cap) and as a distinguishing mark, they wear round their necks large rosaries, just as devout Muslims wear the rosary of ninety-nine beads, one for each of the attributes of God. The Fathers are all bearded like the Muslim Arabs.

He forbade his missionaries in the Sahara to preach the gospel.

"I do not only forbid public preaching of the gospel but preaching of any kind even to individuals. The time is not ripe for making converts. Your task is to win the affection and confidence of the Kabyles by works of charity. If you do anything more you will spoil all future prospects." His fundamental rule was "adopt the exterior life and language of the Kabyles, prove your interest and friendship by becoming one of them. . . ."

This, the Cardinal's method, is, I am sure, the only way in which it is possible to secure the confidence of Muslims and to bring them to an attitude of sympathy, not only to Christianity but to civilization of the West which has its roots in Christianity, and it is a method that I tried to follow in the Hadhramaut. But this does not mean that I can go all the way with the missionary, particularly those who claim that they have the whole monopoly of truth and the only fold in which there is salvation. The Christian missionary has a mandate which he cannot refuse. In my view the administrator too must be a missionary, but I think it is his wider task to help in achieving that peace, and happiness too, which is promised to men of goodwill of whatever faith they be. As a guide in his task he can have nothing better than the teachings of Jesus, and I have often found that the most fanatical Muslims, fanatical because they have not had a chance of learning that any other faith may have truths to offer them, responsive, for example, to the parables, and I know full well that had one divulged their authorship they would have fallen on deaf ears.

I do not think that we ought to allow missionaries into Muslim countries where the people are definitely against having them, though I would certainly help them there if and when they are invited. After all, if we are helping Muslim Arab countries to make their independence more real we must admit that their faith is as important to their progress as ours is to us, otherwise we might as well say we can give them no help until they have all adopted our faith. We know quite well, and for that matter the missionary knows quite well, that little if any progress can be made in the actual conversion of Muslims. I myself believe that in the desert area any such conversion is not within the remote bounds of possibility. It seems to me that it is therefore our task to encourage the Muslim, where we have influence, to live up to the best in his own faith, and, as I say, I have found in the

actual teachings of Jesus very little to which the Muslim does not subscribe.

I have known some administrators maintain that Islam is such an unsatisfactory religion we ought to encourage missions in the hope that they might change it: others that as we are Christians we should support missionary activity anywhere. I feel this is wrong and not only for the reasons I have given. Although personally I by no means hold the view that Islam is as good as Christianity, let alone better, I know it and its real spirit well enough to recognize it as capable of helping man's advance. A lot of the prejudice against Islam is due to muddled thinking. The Arabs are an unsatisfactory race politically, the Arabs are Muslims, *ergo* Islam is unsatisfactory. The character of the Arabs and of Islam are both due to the desert, but whereas the latter arises from the solitude and the simplicity, the former comes from the separation of man from man and the struggle for existence. These result in individualism and an unfortunate spirit of each for himself. Many of us who like the Arabs well know how unsatisfactory they can be politically. We should do better with them if we realized more fully that while they are a nation culturally, they are not a nation politically, and there is much constructive work to be done in the advancement and reconciliation of their culture and ours.

The presence of missionaries in the forests and bush of Africa is, however, on quite a different footing. Their work there stands as a monument for all to see. Provided the stream of missionaries does not dry up, which it will not, they will be able to keep alight the faith they preach to the glory of God and to the happiness of the African.



## Chapter IX

### THE DIFFICULT PART OF THE JOURNEY

*And God shall make thy body pure, and give thee knowledge to endure  
This ghost-life's piercing phantom pain, and bring thee out to Life Again.  
And God shall make thy soul a Glass where eighteen thousand Aeons pass,  
And thou shalt see the gleaming Worlds as men see dew upon the grass.*

FLECKER.

*Where, neath dog-star, without or herb or bush,  
Is giddy drought, consuming bitterness;  
Where woven have hot winds the sliding sands:  
And only is God; and under empty lofs,  
The fearful echoing of man's forlorn voice.*

CHARLES DOUGHTY.

PEOPLE had and have a good deal of trouble in placing us. Before we left England I was assured by those who knew West Africa that a party like mine would give me enormous prestige. Although two children might be thought rather paltry I should certainly be credited with four wives, and that would put my stock up enough to compensate for many shortcomings. On the whole that was much more reasonable than some of the guesses which were made on the journey, for as often as not Doreen and I were credited with the parentage of *all* the other five. Doreen did not find this flattering as there was actually only nine years difference between her and Elizabeth, and rather less between her and Rahima, though many people take Rahima for sixteen.

Once in Egypt Doreen's Arab hostess was asked if Zahra was really her daughter. "Oh yes," was the reply, "the husband's rather dark, you know. Comes from the Sudan!" After that it is fair to quote an independent witness, Freya Stark, who in a passage which aroused my just indignation at the time attributed to me "a blue-eyed expression which must have given him a misleading and seraphic appearance as a small boy in the choir," while of herself she had written elsewhere that she journeyed up a wadi, destroying as she

## THE DIFFICULT PART OF THE JOURNEY

went the illusion that "every English woman must be tall and fair and that their generic name is Doreen." The manager of the hotel had also taken us to be the parents of the rest. Whether he had considered the matter at all in the light of the Mendelian theory I do not know. He was always cheerful, but sometimes slightly off-sober, and as he sat talking to us our second night, he confided his difficulties to us. Might he, considering the varied hues, enquire if there had not been more than one father?

His wife was rarely seen as she busied herself in the bedrooms and the kitchen. She was an Algerian, but comparatively happy here, so her husband said. He told us that food was not easy. There was sometimes beef, sometimes camel and sometimes just goat or sheep. A few vegetables, onions, carrots, lettuce, but no potatoes. They made the bread in the hotel. In the summer there are apricots, peaches, plums and grapes.

We rested a second night at Tamanrasset because I had hoped to hear news of the tyres. This, however, had not come by four o'clock on the afternoon of the 13th when we decided to start off on the last and most difficult lap of the Sahara crossing. Kassou himself had only done it once when he had gone to Agades eight years previously. Ordinarily he drove lorries back and forth between El Golea and Tamanrasset. We filled up with petrol and I also paid 3,332 francs for the two hundred litres of petrol laid down for us at In Gezzam, and 4,434 francs for the transport from El Golea.

On our way out I called in to see Captain Morales and to ask him to tell Agades of our departure and request Zinder to do what they could about the tyres. Then we headed out of the little town, reading for the first time the names of West African towns on the blue enamel signpost, where amongst others Kano in British Nigeria figured. The distances it gave to the places through which we had to pass were:

In Gezzam	410
In Abangarit	690
Agades	980
Zinder	1540
Dosso	2300
Niamcy	2500

## THE END OF THE PISTE

It was only at Tamanrasset that I heard authoritatively that the route we had proposed to follow, which we had been given in England, missing Zinder and passing through Gangara to Tessana, had been abandoned some years ago.

We travelled only twenty-two miles this first evening over the built part of this southern stretch. It was well enough graded and for the most part well built, though here and there at wadi crossings the sharp rocks flung together to make the foundation of the road in the usual Arab way were completely uncarpeted by any trace of earth or sand, and this on each occasion meant that every passenger had to descend to avoid any risk to our precious tyres. We camped at last in a good wadi bed, not far from a circle of beduin shepherds gathered round their evening fire. Soon our own was blazing merrily and the whistling kettle announced our evening tea.

We had not been going much more than twenty miles the next morning when the good road indeterminately petered out. From now on for another three hundred miles or so there were no built stretches of road at all, though endless piles of stones stretching southward showed the route most generally considered to be passable. In the Hadhramaut it was so often the rule that anywhere off the 'official' road was better than the road itself, that it had surprised me to read in the Shell and A.A. guides that one should on no account leave this marked track which was recognized as the best, for on either side of it one might fall into deep sand or 'fesh fesh'. 'Fesh fesh' is the Saharan term for a kind of rotten earth on which a windstrewn layer of coarse sand or small stones sometimes give a greater appearance of solidity than is actually the case. This exists in all deserts. In the Hadhramaut it was simply known as 'terab', earth or dust, and it is a far more tiring and dirty medium from which to extricate oneself than honest sand. We had, however, been advised both at Golea and Tamanrasset to follow the zig-zag patterns of the great Michelin tyres used by the S.A.T.T. vehicles, and no better advice could be given, if you can find them. But we found in practice that the Hadhramaut rule on the whole applied, for anywhere on the actual track one could be pretty sure of tumbling at frequent intervals into a grave dug by some previous traveller.

We covered a hundred and twenty-seven miles on our first day's

## THE DIFFICULT PART OF THE JOURNEY

travel in this wide waste of sand, being ensablé only six times, which I felt to be satisfactory considering that on one of these occasions we were stuck for over an hour. We could find no shade whatsoever for our midday halt, but benefited from a fairly cooling breeze, and the family lay prostrate in such shade as the car could afford. (We had seen neither bush nor grass all day.) The vast areas of sand over which we travelled were untidily and sparsely scattered with small hills and granite rocks of familiar shape and colour, save for one brief space when we passed through outcrops of a pale slate blue. It was a pity that during our last ensablément the sun began to set for this was perhaps the most glorious of the desert sunsets that we saw, and the pity was that one could not sit in silence to absorb something of all this glory, staged it might seem for us alone, for no other sign of life could be seen.

We spotted a little group of four rocks with shelter for a Primus in between them and with the sand rising gradually up to them so that it looked a comfortable place to lie, and had a little height from which we could survey the world of emptiness around. Thither Rahima, Margaret and the children, loaded with the Primus, pots and water, trudged, while Kassou and the rest of us completed the disinterment of the car. This was soon done, and we drove it near to our camping place which now became our home for the night. It was ours rent free, a desirable desert residence. The smooth sand formed the best of lounges when carpeted with tarpaulins and blankets, and no one objected to your putting your legs up on the sofas. It would serve for dining-room, and later, when we were stretched out on the sand in a row of five, with other blankets on top, a bedroom. There were admirable lavatories and bathrooms at a short distance behind other smooth grey rocks. Running water was laid on from the tank of the car. One turned a tap and there it was. The car of course was a luxuriously fitted bedroom for the children. Electric light in our desert dwelling was more than we had at home.

But all was not well in the kitchen. There the Primus roared away and our two hurricane lamps, set on the dividing wall on each side of the serving hatch to the dining-room, shed a soft yellow light. But the cook was in a furious temper, muttering her woes in Arabic to the kettle and saucepan. A vast soliloquy went on in increasing

vehemence addressed to the unfortunate saucepan, which would occasionally be shaken or stirred with vicious violence, but directed largely, I think, at me, though vicariously at least everybody got some. What it was all about I cannot remember now, nor can she.

Rahima is always happiest when doing something useful. She feels, perhaps too deeply, an intellectual isolation due to a purdah upbringing. It is as though a flower had been kept in a dark cellar for a long time and then brought out into the sunshine where it makes valiant efforts to become as other flowers. And Rahima's efforts during the last five years have been not only valiant but remarkably successful. It is no small achievement to have learnt to read and write English, improve Arabic, follow the news of a world which you never knew before, read books and learn western ways. But she will never be satisfied till she has convinced herself that she is on the level of her neighbours. This sometimes leads to trouble. She had the job of doing the domestic work of the journey and felt its importance. If anyone tried to lend a hand or take over something in her domain it led to trouble. Maybe something like that had happened this night.

Truth to tell, we all of us had spells of irritation and bad temper at times. Doreen says "we all complained in different ways, Elizabeth by saying nothing but looking rather fierce, Margaret by moans of 'Oh, gosh,' Rahima by mutterings in Arabic, myself by shortness of temper, and W.H.I. by a general emanation of sometimes voiced and sometimes silent disapproval. The children were just told to shut up if they became cross or complaining."

Zahra and Leila are really remarkably good on journeys. Zahra, child of the desert herself, and Leila born in Cairo and hence known in Hadhramaut as Al Masriya, have spent a large part of their short lives in travelling. Leila came down the Red Sea at the age of a month, happily oblivious of Italian bombers; Zahra when little more than two had taken a forced landing with complete unconcern, playing with sticks and stones and eating rusks within a few minutes of landing. They had been to Ethiopia; they still remember the lions roaring in the bush when we broke down on the roadside one night. They had travelled over the Yemen mountains in boxes slung on a mule, and had slept in them to the lullaby of the tinkling

## THE DIFFICULT PART OF THE JOURNEY

bells on them. They had ridden their own donkeys on Hadhramaut paths and Leila was certainly the first European child to see the outskirts of the Rub 'al Khali. Now they were in the Sahara. They slept when they felt like it, they ate when food was going. They complained little even of the dreadful dust. They were beginning to take things in. But desert, or bush, or lush pasture land, it was all very much the same to them. They took interest in children and animals, a bird or a flower. They collected things at halts, even if only coloured or rounded stones.

Kassou's quiet and courteous ways made him a perfect companion in the circumstances in which we were living. He was never obtrusive but always there if his help were needed. When the day's run was over he would help us to unload what was required from the car roof, to draw water from a jerrican or gather firewood. He always *shared* jobs, neither expecting us to do nothing nor avoiding giving a hand. Yet he was ever ready to do anything we had left undone. After he had helped to clear the patch of ground on which we were to sit and sleep of stones, or maybe of bush if there was any, he would set about digging a hole for himself to sleep in. He fed on dried meat, dates and large millet loaves, but always had tea with us. While Rahima was cooking he would usually help her. They found endless amusement in each other's Arabic; he found her rather an enigma. To-night he tactfully kept out of her way. When he had fed and drunk his tea he would curl himself up in his hole and was soon snoring. Rahima said you could hear him a mile off.

Now the curtains were drawn. We could no longer see the rosy landscape pictures of purpled rocks and rich red sand. We were hung around with velvet curtains and the lofty ceiling glowed with distant incandescent lamps hung in space.

At first the domestic atmosphere rather upset the conviviality of dinner, but it gradually improved with polite conversation. We enjoyed these dinners. They were the real meal of the day. We were generally too hot and tired to eat much lunch, and having no tinned fruit, which is quite the best thing for car lunches in hot, dry countries—the Ministry of Food had been unable to allow us any—we fell back in the end on tea and cornflakes with tinned milk. Cheese or paste and a little butter with lifeboat biscuits was another course—

best taken before the cornflakes, but we got tired of melted bully in the heat. The *pièce de résistance* for dinner was a large plate of curried M. and V., to which was added tinued potatoes and sometimes bully. That, followed by cheese and biscuits and lots more tea, induced a feeling of satisfaction and calm repose in which one could really enjoy the night. My first half-hour or so of rest with sight focused on Orion, and thoughts set at infinity, was followed by peaceful sleep.

When calm was restored this was a night on which one could experience that deep sense of peace and union with the Infinite, which in my knowledge can only come under the wide expanse of heaven in these solitary places. As I lay there in the still small hours of the night, for a brief moment this vast calm, which had come so often before in the solitudes of the wilderness, pervaded my being and forgetting the weariness of the flesh, I soared again in the vast tracts of the starry vaults above.

There are certain places and scenes in which great peace of mind and soul can be felt. Some of these come back vividly to me, different and inferior to this desert peace though they may be. In the old university town of Leyden in Holland there is a quiet green lawn behind the ethnological museum. In this still spot, set on a bank of black slag and with a background of great magnolia trees, their pure white blossoms gleaming in the bright green of the foliage, sit five great Buddhas, in whose calm presence one can sit for an hour or so and imbibe a feeling of peace with the world. I remember, too, how I found the same feeling in one of the shrines in the Temple of the Tooth at Kandy, where the gigantic figure of the reclining Buddha lies in a bed of sweet-scented lotus blooms. I remember the peace of a benediction service in the lofty vaulted heights of Milan cathedral, and again on the hot stillly nights in Zanzibar in the cathedral which stands on the site of the old slave market. Peace too brooded over the silent tomb of the prophet Hud when we first visited it in 1934, but the peace which one finds in these man-made shrines cannot equal that of the great deserts of the world, where man is alone with just the first of God's creations and feels more surely than elsewhere the company of God Himself if there is nothing to distract him from it.

## Chapter X

### HARD GOING TO THE BORJ OF IN GEZZAM

*Every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon.*

NEHEMIAH iv. 17

*Despatched on this date, as received by the rail,  
Per runner, two bugs of the Overland Mail.*

*Is the torrent in spate? He must ford it or swim.  
Has the rain wrecked the road? He must climb by the cliff.  
Does the tempest cry 'Halt'? What are tempests to him?  
The service admits not a 'but' or an 'if'. . . .*

*From rail to ravine—to the peak from the vale—  
Up, up through the night goes the Overland Mail.*

KIPLING.

WE arose early on the morning of the 15th of March ready for the day's labours. And labours they were indeed, for that day we covered only forty-two miles, being ensablé ten times, once for four hours.

The driving and the endurance of Doreen and Elizabeth, who in two-hourly turns drove us over four thousand miles, was a performance which I could not sufficiently admire, but in this heat and exhaustion I feared their and my powers of endurance might well come to an end, but though energies flagged, courage did not, and five o'clock found us speeding at pace over a vast plain of fairly hard sand. What a relief it was. At one moment I had almost thought we were done, and I think it was only knocking off for a rest and something to eat that helped us to get the car out of its worst grave. That, and the Landings' help, got us through.

All day we had found our way over and around living rock and through soft clinging sand in which we only survived by skilful driving. Even then we had lost our exhaust and silencer when the car skidded in the sand and bounded over a projecting rock. But



alas, the speed we were making in the evening did not enable us to increase our mileage greatly, for with a deal of spluttering the car came to a stop with sand in the petrol feed. Kassou changed the pump, but night had fallen by the time the engine was running again.

Most of the day's work had been done by Doreen, Elizabeth and Kassou with Rahima too digging like a trojan to get us out of our many graves. Poor Margaret had the worst day of all, for she was suffering almost beyond endurance with tummy trouble, and crawled exhaustedly in and out of the car, dragging her weary limbs from point to point, when the car had to be rushed out of one grave and possibly into another. What worried her most was not being able to help. While the rest of us were busied round the car she was glad to rest on the cooling sands, and Rahima and the children busied themselves about the evening meal. At the welcome coming to life of the engine we left off work and stretched out luxuriously to drink tea.

Kassou squatted by Rahima, the lamp by which she was working lighting up his bronze, turban-crowned face. He was silent, resting and watching for some time. Then:

"She was disturbed (the word conveyed tired, overwhelmed, speechless, even angry) this day, that one."

Rahima looked round to see towards whom he was jerking his head. It was Elizabeth.

"But that one"—a jerk at Doreen—"is a strong one!" A jerk at Margaret and Elizabeth: "Is He (he never called me anything except *Huwa*, he or him, except in French when I was promoted to Monsieur) their father?"

Rahima, used to such enquiries, shook her head.

"Then why are they here?"

"That one"—a jerk at Elizabeth—"writes. That one"—Margaret—"is the teacher."

A grunt. Then: "Then which are his children?"

A jerk at Zahra and Leila from Rahima.

"But is that one his child?" A jerk at Zahra.

"They have nourished her and brought her up since before I came to them."

"But is he the begetter?"

"She is an Arab."

HARD GOING TO THE BORJ OF IN GEZZAM

"An Arab? She is an Abyssinian." Zahra's mop has caused her to be claimed as such in Abyssinia itself.

"Nay; she is an Arab. She is of the Hadhramaut."

The Hadhramaut defeated him.

"The Island of the Arabs."

A pause.

"Why are you with them?"

Simply: "I follow them."

"But you are a Muslim?"

"Yes, I am a Muslim."

"You don't eat pork?"

"No, I don't eat pork."

"You don't drink wine?"

"No, I don't drink wine."

"You pray?"

"Yes, I pray."

"You fast?"

"No, I don't fast."

A pause. "Yes, there are many Muslims who don't fast."

A pause.

"There is no God but God and Muhammad is the prophet of God."

A pause.

"They must love the Arabs and the Muslims."

"Yes, they love the Arabs and the Muslims."

We supped and sought some sleep in the sand. As we lay there we were awoken about midnight by the sound of a car in the distance. Kassou had the most astonishing powers of hearing and could hear a lorry long before it was audible to us. Presently the loom of lights swept the desert sky, and soon the northbound lorry of the S.A.T.T. stopped beside us. On it there were passengers from the Congo and from French West Africa. One charming administrator, whose name, alas, is unknown to me, spoke of the glories of the desert sky, the North Star pointing his way home, the Southern Cross pointing ours south. At this hour my soldier constellation was no longer above us and Scorpion sprawled across the vault above.

I asked the driver if by any chance he had our tyres. I did not

## MIDNIGHT DELIVERY BY DESERT MAIL

really expect them because the margin of time between making the request to Zinder and his departure was short. He said he had tyres for "Mr. Gold" whom he was to find in the desert, but he thought they must surely be ours. On his waybill they were certainly addressed to "Mr. Gold", but when he brought them out they were labelled "*M. Ingrams, Administrateur du Gold Coast.*" This remarkably fine delivery in the Sahara set the seal on my admiration for the S.A.T.T. organization.

Soon the chauffeur and his passengers bade us a cheerful good night, the former telling us we should meet again in Zinder in a few days. He thundered off into the night, thinking nothing of the difficulties ahead, which I suppose were little more to him than Piccadilly to a London bus driver. Gradually the distant throbbing of his motors died away and silence reigned in the desert.

The halting place which had been chosen for us by circumstance was not many hundred yards behind the Landings. Indeed, a good deal of the previous day had been spent in their company for they too had stuck and twice had tried to help us out of the sand, once to their own peril. They had come down and talked to us in the evening, and we had decided to start off early so that we could travel in company for the greater mutual assistance of us all. It was twelve minutes past four when we got going, but we were ensablé almost at once as in the dark Doreen had missed the Frenchman's tracks. It was six o'clock before we got going again and half-past before we really started as we waited for the Landings. A few minutes later we met a northbound car, a Belgian with his son and daughter from the Congo. We heard a few days later that they had been badly stuck for a day or two in the territory in which we had left so many graves.

We had sixty-one miles to do to get to In Gezzam and our passage was rather better than I had dared to hope. We were only ensablé three times, and our stops were principally to let the engine cool and to examine the tyres. Little of the great stretches of sand over which we went was really stable, and the only sure method of getting across them was to race at top speed, largely in second gear. About half-past nine a sand storm started and we roared across the desert which had become an inferno with its scorching breath. The engine

got so hot that the exhaust from the broken pipe almost boiled one of the jerricans of water inside. We gathered up speed on the harder patches of sand, and then plunged into the softer spots in which the car behaved like an amphibian taking to water, rocketing and buffeting from side to side as it wallowed in the waves.

There was little to see except the great wide rolling ocean of sand, though presently we drove through wide gulfs between towering precipitous walls which reminded me rather of the Wadi Rum in Transjordan. There had been little vegetation for miles when at last we came to a solitary tree, the first for two days, standing alone amidst queer shaped rocks. Vegetation started again after that. In the shallow hollows in the sand there were great tufts of grass like jade-tinted sheep. Then in the distance I saw a clump of trees which I felt sheltered the borj of In Gezzam. So it proved to be, with lovely casuarinas, so large as to give a generous shade. Round them were a few mud buildings, including what had once been one of the loneliest hotels in the world.

Later, in Zinder, the bank manager produced rather wistfully the menu and wine card of a dinner he had eaten there before the war. I have forgotten exactly what were the rare delicacies with which he had regaled himself, but I remember there was champagne at thirty-five francs a bottle and whisky at seven a tot. All this luxury is surely unnecessary in the desert and unreal as anything could be, though I would rather see it maintained if it meant that more Frenchmen, and particularly foreigners, could make the acquaintance of the Sahara and see what has been done there. But some simple cleanliness, a cool and sheltered spot to sleep, with clean water and even the provision of simple meals is not a luxury but a necessity in a place such as In Gezzam. This solitary well lies two hundred and fifty-two miles from Tamanrasset and a hundred and twenty-six from In Abangarit. Nowhere else is there a single drop of water to get and nowhere else a reasonable spot of shade, save when the welcome pall of night comes down.

There was another great encouragement, largely psychological, in reaching In Gezzam. We had come to the bottom of the four-million sheet of North West Africa. El Golea was the first place on the route where we saw hanging in the hotel a wall map showing

our route and including Tamale, for most maps in such places might take you across the Sahara but were more likely to continue with you to Chad, French Equatorial Africa and even the Cape. Latitude by latitude we had dropped down the terrestrial globe at about the rate of two degrees daily from 51 to less than 20, and In Gezzam was our first tropical stop just within the Tropic of Cancer.

We could fold and put away North West Africa, which was now not a coloured piece of paper but a magic charm recalling a thousand different scenes, and take the still unknown four-million sheet of West Africa. These two sheets covered all our route except the European part, and Margaret by ruling on to them the boundaries covered by the large scale sheets, had made them a useful index to our way. For daily use we had the 1,000,000 or 1,500,000 sheets with which the War Office had kindly provided me, and Elizabeth changed them nightly into the map case, which, with the route book, lay on my knees the length of the journey.

We drove into the shady courtyard of the borj, and as I got out of the car there strutted up to me the small and irresponsible youth who is now the king of In Gezzam. I asked that we should have shelter, but he was first concerned to ensure himself that I should undertake to pay for it, and it was the same when I asked for firewood. I was indignant at this treatment and so was Kassou. Did he not know, said the latter, that I was a great 'hakim' travelling with the favour and protection of government? The boy was soon reduced to pulp and submissiveness and apologized for his behaviour as he did not know my estate.

"Are you not an Arab, and do you not know the customs of the Arabs?" I demanded. "Though I might be as humble as the dust so would the Arabs treat me as a king. Is not hospitality to a traveller the law of the desert? Should you not rather be seeking to find us in any case the best of such simple comforts as this borj, which you have allowed to get into such a disgraceful state, affords?"

Ashamed, he begged forgiveness, and besought that I would accept a chicken from him. I asked him where was the dining-room that we might prepare and eat our meal. He opened the door to show that it was full of a miscellaneous collection of his own goods. In the middle of the dusty floor, where what had once been a little bar still

stood, a diminutive baby ostrich cocked an enquiring eye at me. The little creature was let out, much to the delight of Zahra and Leila. The boy told me that he had bought it for two hundred francs from a wandering Targi.

In one of the bedrooms we found two beds on which still lay soiled mattresses and, rather unprepossessing though the surroundings were, Margaret at last found some rest and slept the day out. We had refreshing washes, and set up our dining-room in what had once been the office of the hotel. There in a corner of the inn was the barrel of two hundred litres of petrol which had been waiting for us in this lonely spot for about a couple of months.

Presently the Landings and Burnaby arrived, and towards evening two more lorries bearing the party who had taken over our rooms at Bouzarea. The courtyard of the inn was crowded out and the sand storm blowing strongly. Some of us tried to sleep on the flat roof, but when early morning came Elizabeth and I were the only survivors. The night had also brought two Arab lorries from the south, with a well-known merchant of Algiers and French West Africa, Maulai Hamid. He was a dark, distinguished figure, immaculate in full Arab dress, and I greeted him in the early morning in the desert tongue. He was standing by one of the doors of the caravanserai, looking rather uncertainly at this western invasion, but his face lighted up when I saluted him with peace and the hope that God might make the morning good for him. We were soon talking and he gave Kassou and myself news of his passage, advising us to follow his tracks, except in one place where he had gone over a rather difficult patch.

## Chapter XI

### WE FINISH OUR CROSSING OF THE SAHARA

*At the muezzin's call to prayer,  
The kneeling faithful thronged the square,  
And on Pushikara's lofty height  
The dark priest chanted Bralima's might.  
Amid a monastery's weeds  
An old Franciscan told his beads;  
While to the synagogue there came  
A Jew to praise Jehovah's name.  
The one great God looked down and smiled  
And counted each His loving child;  
For Turk and Brahmin, monk and Jew  
Had reached Him through the gods they knew.*

HARRY ROMAINE.

*I pity the man who can travel from Dan to Beersheba, and cry, "'Tis all barren!"*

STERNE.

*If one live any time with the Arab he will have all his life after a feeling of the desert.*

DOUGHTY.

*The truth is that to look for the secret of the Desert under any form of words is to lose one's pains.*

HELEN WADDELL.

*With me along some Strip of Herbage strown  
That just divides the desert from the sown.*

OMAR KHAYYÁM.

WE were the first to drive away from the gates of the borj, and before long were ploughing through some of the pale jade plush lying across the sand. Then we coursed over rocks and hills, which were hard enough though you had to make up your mind quickly which way you were going, to avoid hitting outcrops. After that we were again on long stretches of rolling sand in between short spells of good jöl. Our progress was good enough at speed, but if we had slowed we should have been certain to stick.

A few kilometres out from In Gezzam we passed a sign marking the boundary between Algeria and French Niger. I was amused a

## WE FINISH OUR CROSSING OF THE SAHARA

day or two later at the indignation with which an administrative officer claimed that contrary to an agreement, of I have forgotten what year, Algeria had annexed a stretch of desert belonging to the Niger Colony; for the boundary, he claimed, should really be at In Gezzam.

Here and there the sand was firm and we sped over it on top gear at a high speed. Presently patches of vegetation occurred again, with dark green tufted trees set in jade and beige. Kassou's sharp eyes had often seen the few gazelles we had met since leaving El Golea. Again he cried "A gazelle!" Certainly at first sight it *looked* like a gazelle racing away in the rising sand storm, but here, as in the Hadhramaut, there were rolling dried up shrubs bowling over the jöls, looking for all the world like gazelles at speed, and throughout the morning these ghost gazelles chased each other across our path. When you saw them closer they looked like witches' brooms racing after their riders.

After twenty or thirty miles patches appeared in which other vegetation mingled with the jade. In rather less than three hours, when we had covered fifty miles, we had outdistanced the sand storm and had come to a track where, instead of endless sand with patches of jade grass, we were driving continually through jade grass with small patches of sand. Then there was less sand and more earth, and we drove along on a good jöl. There followed more sand, in which once we were ensablé. Occasionally there was a rough surface very holey and bumpy. After another twenty miles we had come to vast prairies mingled with sand which covered the jöls, and in eighty or ninety miles from In Gezzam I saw the first signs of definite changes to African plain country. It recalled the Athi plains in Kenya, and later on the coastlands of Somali. There were many camels grazing, some of them piebald.

Thus was the battle of these borderlands. So the strife between the desert and the sown goes on year after year. Sometimes, reinforced with a scanty shower of rain, the herbage gains a precarious round, pushing valiantly into enemy territory. More often the invading sand, with its constant allies the parching sun and the wind, mops up the outposts of vegetation and plants pickets in its lines. It is a struggle between life and death, and life is always on the defensive. We could read the story clearly on the battle ground.



## THE END OF THE SANDS

In the afternoon the petrol feed again began to give trouble, but we found it cured itself if we filled up with petrol. We were then again back in Arabian sands, driving on and on over a boundless ocean with no other horizon before us. Elizabeth said, "You feel you can just go on for ever and ever until you roll off the end of the world." After some miles of this we came to some quite good trees, and ahead there were some dunes into which the road led. Herds of camels and goats were scattered all over the horizon of sand, magnified by refraction into pre-historic beasts or looking like sculptured arches. Presently I saw a mud building in the distance which, as it grew closer, resolved itself, as we had known it must, into the so-called resthouse of In Abangarit, a hundred and twenty-six miles from In Gezzam.

It marked the end of the desert.

We had crossed the Sahara. . . . It was a journey which many have made, and which in the early months of 1947 many were making in almost pioneering conditions, since even the modest pre-war facilities had largely disappeared. In the absence of a railway or a proper road it is a journey which will always be an adventure, especially when made on one's own and not by the bus service.

I felt a great lightening of heart when I knew that the sands were finished, for, love them as I do, it had been a heavy burden of responsibility for us, a party of seven, to get safely across the great wastes. I always want to go back to the sands, but I feel safer on a camel with trusty beduin companions. Camels are a great deal slower than cars, but the real ship of the desert is not so liable to mysterious 'pannes', and the pad of its feet is better suited to the full enjoyment of the quiet solitudes than the clatter of a car.

Now that the desert was behind us and the prospect of the bush with such different emotions lay ahead, I fell to pondering on the comparative attractions of deserts and Arabs and bush and Africans. Somehow deserts and Arabs have a quality all of their own, which cannot be compared with anything in 'civilized' or settled life.

Bush and Africans—note I tie the two together; Africans in towns are like anybody else in towns—are quite different. Their devotees, and there are many of them, are also different from those of deserts and Arabs. They love the African and they love the bush, but unless

they reach some degree of "turning native", which is a disaster, they never become one with them. They are always apart, perhaps because there is such a gulf in culture between them and the African, and because to lead an African life in the bush is too uncomfortable to be borne and almost sure to lead to disease. But the adept of deserts and Arabs has nothing, if he be tough enough in body and mind, to prevent him being part of them. He finds culture, he does not find too much discomfort, he keeps his health, and above all he can keep his own virtue without failing to share and sympathize with what he finds in the people. It is easier to make your relations with deserts and Arabs a richer, fuller relationship than with bush and Africans.

It was interesting to see the reactions of the desert on the rest of the circus. I had always felt one must either love or hate deserts. I did not see how, except in children, reaction to them could be neutral.

It was only towards the end of the desert that Elizabeth and Margaret saw the kind of country they had expected all the Sahara to be, a boundless sea of yellow sand. Elizabeth denied that it raised any particular emotions in her. It was just one kind of scenery to be compared with any other and for her, indeed for all of us, from the purely scenic point of view, nothing on the journey compared with the Atlas mountains. To her, always practical, but with a matter-of-factness used deliberately to disguise a shyness, itself concealing emotions which, as she said, it would make her "hot about the collar" to display, the desert was something to be beaten. She had summoned up a lot of courage to drive through it and she was determined to do it. The same shyness which concealed her inner feelings gave her always a deceptive air of complete self-reliance. It made her appear as self-sufficient, so that she was "the cat which walked alone." This cat-like illusion was heightened by an extreme and very pleasant tidiness of mind and person. She rarely looked ruffled and seemed to lick her paws daintily and curl up when she could, as on a sofa in front of a fire, which I expect was what she, a natural lover of comfort, when it was going, really preferred. The clue to reality perhaps was that she didn't like cats at all, but had a great affection for dogs and horses. Camels amused her, but it was only the young ones, as all young animals, in which she took delight. To her the delight of

## DESERT AND GLEN

the journey was in achievement, akin to the pleasure she felt not in sewing, but in producing a dress, not in typing but in producing a good draft.

Margaret was quite different. In some ways perhaps she resembled Rahima as a result of little touch with the world, but she was strongly imaginative and something of the spell of the desert grew upon her. Nevertheless, I think her affections are too deeply rooted in her native glens for her to feel other than an exile elsewhere. Many of us of course have the "no place like home" feeling, but with Margaret it was so acute that the beauties of the lands did but intensify, though pleasurably, the sense of separation from her own. Some of this appeared in some lines she wrote at Tamanrasset.

The sun parched desert lies, its mighty breast  
Unhushed by shadow. Stone on weary stone  
Of boundless desolation, uncaressed  
By pity—where a world might die unknown.

The endless day burns on; the grey dust grieves  
Our eyes and rends our half-caught dreams apart;  
Here stunted shrubs put forth their shrivelled leaves  
Like love unfruitful in a loveless heart.

And now an upstart ridge of weathered rock,  
Where demons lurked in prayer—worn hermit's den,  
Ah God, I long for cool Lintraithen loch  
Wrapped in the heather of an Angus glen.

And so the hours trudge on with bleeding feet  
While sweet night unwinds her darkling hair,  
And every colour deadened by the heat  
Adorns the desert at her evening prayer.

Silence at last; no soul knit to my own,  
While heaven's anchoret her light embars;  
I ask for nothing—save to be alone  
With all the aching music of the stars.

Rahima too had expected the desert to be something different, though she had seen the bad lands of the Hadhramaut. "It is nothing

## WE FINISH OUR CROSSING OF THE SAHARA

like I imagined. I thought there will be women drawing water out of wells, children and some humanity going and coming. But I see only the sky and the earth, not a soul breathing except an old owl blinking on a tree. In this vast piece of earth there is nothing but heaps of soft sand. The heat bothers us all the morning till the sunset, then it begins to get cool and becomes very cold. I feel the heat very badly. I have forgotten that I was born in a hot country exactly like this."

Doreen, who perhaps has seen and felt as much of deserts and desert travelling by camel or donkey or mule, by car and on foot as any English woman, felt all the weariness of the day and found it paid for by the glory of the night.

"The desert from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. is hell on earth. In the early dawn and morning, or in the late evening, it is the most heavenly place on earth. At these times you contemplate, enjoy, eat heartily, work or take exercise, but from ten to four the mind and body are sluggish—I don't want to do anything, eat anything, contemplate anything, or have any mental or physical exertion. I only want to be in a coma until life is renewed with the going down of the sun.

"Nothing is more beautiful than a desert night. Nowhere else can the stars be seen so brilliantly (except at sea) nor seem so friendly. It is only in the desert that you get a feeling of being the infinitesimal part of the whole universe that you are—a sense of belonging and being part of the air, the sky, the moon and stars. In peopled places you are yourself, individual, trying to feel a uniqueness separating you from all those around you with whom you are in reality so similar. But in the desert you are no longer the physical you, of which you are so conscious in a crowd, but you are also the spiritual you, allied to all the mysteries of the universe and you no longer want to dominate or be unique, but to feel at one with all creation.

"So in the desert the mind takes hold of the body, as long as it can keep the body from feeling physical discomforts. It is only in those cool hours that my mental side has the upper hand—in the day time I am all physical and hating the heat, the thirst, the dust, the blinding glare, the monotony."

To experience the influence of the desert truly and to the full one must have known it in solitude and quiet, free of such noisy contrap-

## SOLITUDE IN DESERT AND CELL

tions as a motor car and certainly not crowded into its limited interior. This freedom we had not had and it explains no doubt why much eluded our initiates. Solitude is an essential ingredient, and so too I think are the hardships to which Doreen refers. Certainly there is no escape from them, but I think they are but the steep ascent to the sublimity which the desert offers to the dweller or the traveller in its borders. St. Thomas Aquinas perceived this in the solitude of his cell. "It is good that we have sometimes grief and adversities for they drive a man to behold himself. . . . Therefore a man ought to settle himself so fully in God, that what adversity soever befall him he shall not need to seek any outward comfort." So too the beduin surrenders himself to God as the only refuge from the adversity which is his daily lot.

This surrender is in the beduin involuntary and imposed upon him by the very nature of the desert of which he forms a part. To the traveller it may become instinctive, a move towards self preservation induced by the same causes. Both, when it has happened, can feel that they are raised up into God. For there is beyond doubt a sublimity, an exaltation in the desert which lifts the soul with it and in the case of the prophet endows it with a vision and an eloquence not vouchsafed in other experience. The very name of God in the desert tongue breathes an exaltation absent from others. The 'I' in Allah, known as the *lam* of glorification, rolls upward and upwards taking its enunciator with it.

Here perhaps lies a fundamental difference between the Muslim and the Christian. While the former, in his desert, involuntarily or instinctively surrenders his soul to God, the latter requires conscious effort. He must lift up his heart to his Lord—the Glorified Lamb, who is the object of his adoration—and Who, be it remembered, Himself came to His destiny through the inspiration of the desert.

To the Christian this surrender does not come easily except perhaps to the monk or the hermit. In solitude the effort is easier. "Shut fast the door of thy soul . . . and keep it warily from beholding of any bodily thing . . . ; and then lift up thy mind to the Lord Jesu, and abide with him in thy cell, for thou shalt not find so much peace without." Yet the solitude of the cell is apt to result in contemplation of things Heavenly to the neglect of the care of others. While the

## WE FINISH OUR CROSSING OF THE SAHARA

solitude of the cell has produced saints, that of the desert has brought forth three great living faiths and many prophets.

Yet there are right ways and wrong ways of using all good things, including deserts. Excess in all things is bad, and like wine and food too much desert can have its ill effects. I should always like to have my desert near me to be used and enjoyed, but I no more want to live in it permanently than I do in a wine-cellar or a larder. A larder indeed is a necessity for all of us, a desert and a wine-cellar are so regarded by some of us. If I had to make the choice I should choose the desert rather than a wine-cellar, believing a little desert for the soul's sake to be more useful than a little wine for the stomach's.

Lawrence, and perhaps others, have seen the desert as a place in which faiths are manufactured, but he seems rather to have believed that it was man alone that made them. That he brought with him a living word born of disillusionment in the world, heard it more certainly in the solitude, and returned with an imagined message more articulate. To me the whole procession of nature, the ordered plan of evolution with the urge in life to rise to something higher, cannot be otherwise explained than by the existence of God who gave life to the world, and the fact that all mankind has a religious impulse points as surely to His presence in us. It is only *how* we see Him that is determined largely by our environment. The desert is not the only crucible in which faiths are forged even if it alone turns out the highest quality. It was the foresty isles of Zanzibar and Pemba in my first tour there which explained for me the way the African saw Him, and it was my first glimpse of the Sinai Desert in 1921 which taught me why the three great monotheistic faiths came out of the desert. The glass through which we see so darkly in forest and city, is clearer, though still dim, in the desert.

This to me is the greatest use of the desert, though the pure joys of distant views through clear air, the lights and colours, the glory of the heavens at night, the restfulness of hard travel, the appreciation of simple pleasures, the greenness of the oasis, are other qualities; and then the hospitality and help, the kindness, and the freedom of the desert dweller.

Yet Lawrence rightly draws a distinction between those who use deserts and those who live in them. Each individual beduin has his

revealed religion instinctive in him and he cannot take credit for his belief. He has a sure trust, he says, but in how narrow a field. He hurts himself not merely to be free, but to please himself. When we think of the beduin as cruel we can remember that if he is cruel to others he is cruel to himself and expects no better than he gives. The life of the desert is a balanced life, but how little there is to put in the balances explains its hardness.

One may well ask if the flocking of hermits to the desert in the fourth and fifth centuries did not represent a wrong use of deserts. Helen Waddell in the introduction to her translation of the Desert Fathers speaks of twenty-two thousand there, and quotes a traveller's report of the end of the fourth century as saying that the dwellers in the desert were all but equal to the populations of the towns. One pictures hermits' cells as thick on desert sands as striped tents on those of Margate. Lecky might well describe this 'ascetic epidemic' as the most painful phase in the moral history of mankind.

The hermits recognized that the solitude of the desert was necessary to close communion with God: they may even have recognized it as being the source of the inspiration of the prophets. What they failed to see was that inspiration could not be born of the desert solitudes themselves. The seed was born of the world: it blossomed in the desert and its fruit ripened in the prophet's return to the world. To expect anything to fructify of the desert alone was to expect a seed to put forth its roots and leaves, to blossom and to fruit in a vacuum. The hermits were little more than holy vegetables, and vegetables are no less vegetables for being holy. To manifest Himself, God had to create the world: the hermits, so to speak, neglected the creation and searched for God apart from it. They could produce nothing inspired because they lacked the manure of life to make the seed grow and manifest its fruits. Yet, as Helen Waddell says, one intellectual concept they did give the world: eternity. Though they could not blossom in the desert their lives and actions proved, as much and perhaps more than those who used the desert properly, that the eternal God dwelt in its solitudes and could there be more clearly seen. Their lives embodied eternity just as the life of the born desert dweller, the beduin, is embodied in God, Who alone is great, Who is the only refuge.

## Chapter XII

### FROM THE WELL OF IN ABANGARIT TO AGADES AND THE END OF THE NOMAD LANDS

*Sweet to ride forth at evening from the wells  
When shadows pass gigantic on the sand,  
And softly through the silence beat the bells  
Along the Golden Road to Samarkand.*

FLECKER.

*God be thy guide from camp to camp: God be thy shade from well to well;  
God grant beneath the desert stars thou hear the Prophet's camel bell.*

FLECKER.

*Bare of all things of which there is no need, the days of our mortality are so  
easy and become a long quiescence! Such is the nomad life, a long holiday,  
wedded to a divine simplicity, but with this often long tolerance of hunger  
in the khala.*

CHARLES DOUGHTY.

*There is no more suffocating feeling in the world than marching through  
Central African bush. The discomforts and disabilities of travelling are  
not compensated for by any advantage except a ready supply of firewood.  
The bushland around Danergu is particularly unpleasant. It is never so  
tall that one may not hope to see over the top of the ugly stunted trees at the  
next low rise, and never in reality low enough to allow one to satisfy one's  
passionate longing. Visibility is limited to a few yards and one's sense of  
direction is confounded. It is infernally hot, because the undergrowth  
effectively shelters one from any breeze. The country is uniformly rolling  
and unbeautiful. A high proportion of the trees are of the virulently thorny  
variety which arch over the rare paths and make life on camel or horseback  
intolerable. Walking is equally distasteful, as the ground is strewn with  
burr grass which enters every fold of clothing and mortifies the flesh like hot  
needles. . . . There are scorpions, snakes, centipedes and tarantulas, not  
to speak of bush folk who have an uncanny sense of their own whereabouts,  
and of yours as well. . . . There are vast areas with no accessible water  
in the dry season, but when it rains the trees drip their moisture down  
your neck.*

FRANCIS RODD (LORD RENNEL)



## A BOWL OF FROTHING CAMEL'S MILK

KASSOU was not too keen on the idea of spending the night at In Abangarit. A couple of hundred yards away lay a well surrounded by dense herds of camels. All the ground was covered with camel droppings and he said, quite rightly, we should find it full of camel ticks. There were two wells and by the nearer one were couched three of the most beautiful white camels I have ever seen, gaily decked in bright coloured saddles with the curious cross-shaped pommel which the Tuareg use. Perhaps the likeness is mere coincidence. None the less, I seem to remember reading of, probably, crusaders setting up saddles with crosses on them when they prayed on their journeys.

Three young Tuareg chieftains, the owners of the camels, were at the well. Two of them wore black veils, but the third had Arab blood, having relations, as he told us, in In Salah. They were clothed in dark blue, and each carried a straight sword and wore many charms and leather pouches. As their clothes unwound in the wind we could see that their hair was long and done in a number of tight plaits. The one who had Arab blood, through whom we conversed, spoke Arabic well and told us that they came from Tamanrasset and were bound for Agades, yet four days by camel from this well. He told us that the pure Tuareg never remove their veils night or day. They all obligingly let us take their photographs and then they brought us a great wooden bowl of frothing white camel's milk from the herds by the other well, and what a luxury it was to drink again deep draughts of this desert nectar, which I think myself is quite the world's best breakfast. It took me back to the days of Al 'Abr where I have most enjoyed camel's milk, and I thought of a desert crossing there on camels when my companions and I had drained dry every camel we met towards the end of our journey.

Our friends invited us to spend the night at the encampment of their tribe some ten kilometres away, and there was nothing I should have liked better, but it was ten kilometres off the road and in the wrong direction. A camelman's idea of what is good for cars does not always harmonize with what the car finds suits it best, and with so long a distance of unknown road before us it was not a risk I felt we could take. We had spent a pleasant hour with these three young men. They looked so clean and civilized and had such easy graceful

manners. One of them before he left brought out a soap box from his saddle bag and washed his hands and feet in water drawn from the well. The three wrapped themselves in their white riding cloaks, committed us to the Peace of God, and cantered away.

We drove on another six miles to camp on red African earth among a clump of thorn trees where other Tuareg roamed. One of the tribe came to us, telling us it was the land of his tribe but that we were welcome to camp there. We gave him tea and he proposed to go and fetch us milk, but came back before long to say that we had camped too far away from his people.

Kassou very apologetically asked if we could spare him some food. He had run short expecting we would have reached Agades. We gave him some 'pâtes' and a tin of bully beef.

He took it over to the hole he had dug himself near Rahima's fire and squatting by her contemplated the tin.

"But I can't eat this!"

"Why not? I eat it."

"But it's pork."

"Nonsense, it's not pork, it's beef."

"But it's in a tin."

"What difference does that make? It's beef."

"No, everything They have in tins is spoilt with pork."

Rahima laughed at him. "It's beef I tell you. Take it and fill your belly with it."

Kassou scratched his head, only half convinced, but Rahima thinks he ate it.

We had seen nothing this evening of the Landings, but shortly before dawn broke we saw the headlights of a couple of cars passing along the road half a mile or so away. At about half-past six we started off back to the road and seeing again two lorries coming along we tried to cut in ahead of them, but they had the speed of us, as we were driving over the rough hillocks, and ant hills. We thought at first it must be the Landings, but it was the other, Bouzarea, party.

Stretches of prairie, real African scrub and jöl succeeded each other and, presently, black earth which had at no very distant date been mud, for it had wide cracks in it. This added yet another to the many

curious sensations we had had in the car: sand, rough stony roads, hills, rocks, tiresome corrugations caused by the lorries, waddling at speed through slithering oceans of sand, switchbacks, all treat you differently. What a lot the car had put up with since it had left the smooth roads of Kent and France! The driver and I were the best off, and that I feel was not saying a great deal, for the long days wearied one more than one can easily express. The children behind became smothered with dust and Doreen and Leila suffered with red and inflamed eyes.

We had come out of the brown section of our journey and had started the red. The typical red of Africa, which in Kenya years before made you think you had become a Red Indian when you first saw your face in the mirror of a train in the morning. Sir Claud Hollis and I in 1926 had travelled some hundreds of miles over Kenya roads in a Bentley, but even in a car such as that our hair, faces and clothes became red, and the red dust penetrated into everything, even into closed suitcases. So it was now, and so it was to be until we came to Tamale. Now did I feel for the first time that I had come to live in a new country, not my own. I felt a stranger in a strange land.

We drove through miles of bush and then out again into barren black plains, some of which were thickly sprinkled with wind-drifted straw. Now one would come to another clump of thorn trees, then more plain and sand. Then we arrived at Tegida n Tisemt, the first large village of French West Africa.

Tegida n Tisemt has been described as a squalid village. By European standards no doubt it is, but it is certainly extremely picturesque, and a measure of dirty untidiness is always to be expected from a village built and lived in by people of nomadic habits. On Hadhramaut standards I should have rather called it a poor village. The architecture was low, one storey only, and roughly finished. I do not think the builders could have been described as artists in mud, but it presented an animated picture full of interest. Stock thronged the open space to the north of the village where, not far from the foot of a cliff, was a muddy pool surrounded by a low wall. Here sat several Tuareg, clad in clean robes of aquamarine and indigo, obviously men of importance, while scantily clad boys and women drew water

for the stock and for domestic purposes. The water at Tegida n Tisent is said to be brackish. We did not try it, for the magnesium impregnated wells of In Salah had worked uncomfortable effects on the whole family. We carried with us the much more appetizing water of In Gezzam. We spent half an hour watching the lively scene around us and the car was soon surrounded by a curious crowd. Arabic speakers were less, and from now on there was little converse that we could hold with the varied peoples of the country through which we passed.

Leaving the place we travelled again over a barren, dark red plain, though soon came to more thorn trees, meeting here a S.A.T.T. tank and lorry from the south. I was surprised to find what I thought was a north-bound petrol tank, for down to In Gezzam the route is supplied from Algiers, and the price of petrol mounts oasis by oasis until at Tamanrasset it has reached the equivalent of ten and sixpence a gallon. Kassou told us, however, that this tank did not carry petrol. It took Algerian wine to French West Africa. But the good people of Agades told us that we should not think they had any share of it for it went to Lake Chad. We had an amusing discussion of the possibilities of organizing a 'ghazzu' by Tuareg for the benefit of Agades.

All along our road African conditions of thorn and dried up prairie vied for mastership with Arabian conditions of barren jöls, and gradually the former prevailed. Of a sudden we came on a well round which well-drilled camels couched in a circle with well-dressed soldiers tending them. Nearby was another well, a patch of brilliant green where were gathered thousands of camels, goats and donkeys. Kassou told us that it was a counting and taxation of stock.

More and more the parkland scenes prevailed, and amongst acacias camels loomed as big as trees, white, piebald, brown and beige and black. We stopped for lunch and were entertained by a dissolute looking old vulture which betrayed not the slightest fear of us. He dropped only a few feet away, stalking around and greedily gobbling dried-up bones. His bald scaly head gave him the appearance of a wizened, dirty, dissolute old man with scabious head, but bright, wicked eyes, whose appearance, combined with active habits, excited disgust rather than pity. There was an old man in Mukalla who

always reminded me of a vulture, now it was a vulture which reminded me of him.

Now and then there was a little more colour to the scene and sap green vegetation on burnt umber made me think of the extraordinary variety of greens there is in nature. Even my eyes, accustomed to so many tropical scenes, found on this journey tints entirely new. Cattle became more plentiful, trailing along the road but wheeling off with tails in air and tossing horns as we came by. Soon the bush was big enough for turtle doves, perhaps one of the most typical birds of Africa, where the shrilling of great crickets and the cooing of doves are the most frequent sounds of nature. Flat slabs of red stone rock piled round in circles, looking as if they had been placed for pre-historic councils, recalled Abyssinia. Guinea fowl appeared and we could have slaughtered dozens for they barely bothered to fly away from the passing car. We stopped for tea. We did so in a real African setting of bush and trees and grass. Many of the trees were clad with leaves, the birds sang and the air was soft.

It was dark when we arrived at Agades and drew up before the old Senussi palace which is now the hotel; Hajj 'Abdullah, the manager, a native of El Golea, had been expecting us but did not know when we should arrive, and the hotel was full with every room taken, for the Landings and the Bouzareaa group had reached there in front of us. A meal, he assured me, there would be, but he could not think what he was going to do to find us accommodation. While he was thinking this out we unpacked the car, and I discovered that he was in process of vacating his own house for us. I asked him if he had not even a roof where we could sleep. Being accustomed to folk who want running water in the bedroom such an idea had not occurred to him, but he led me into the vaulted council chamber where great spiral columns of mud supported a dim and lofty roof. Here twenty or so English were gathered at supper round a table, in scenes which to me were much more suitable for dim lamps and carpeted floors with shrouded figures sitting round the walls. 'Abdullah led me upstairs into a long, deserted Arab room and out on to a flat mud roof, from which the soft luminous night veiled the present and took the mud city back to its historic past. Nearby stood the lofty, curious minaret for which Agades is well known. No quarters could have

suited us better, and I took back the welcome news to the family gathered round the car in the courtyard and somewhat depressed at the thought of nowhere to stay. We trooped up more cheerfully. Servants were already busy spreading the floor with mats and laying mattresses, new sheets and blankets, and tables and chairs and deck chairs made their appearance.

All our diaries record the pleasures of that evening. It was real comfort combined with all the wonder of the night. And we had quite the best hotel meal of our journey. We had bathed. We had clean pink and white checked cloths with napkins before us. There was appetizing soup, a wonderful ragout in unlimited quantities, meat and lettuce. 'Abdullah and his minions stood attentively by waiting to ply us with more, answering questions and telling us of the customs of the country. It was a quiet, but happy party, for we were tired, and it was not long after that we lay down to sleep in a long row of seven! The soft mattresses, the clean linen, the refreshing coolness of the night, what a wonder it was to lie there, gazing at the stars for a few minutes and then to fall into hours of dreamless, blissful sleep.

'Abdullah would charge us nothing for our accommodation, even though we had been much better off on our roof than cooped in stuffy rooms below. But that's the way it is, the *best* things are free, because they are priceless.

With early morning I was soon astir, watching Agades wake up. I do not know of any better way on a short visit of seeing something of the life of a strange place than spending a night on a roof overlooking the neighbours. In the dusk you see many a domestic scene laid out before you, food being prepared and cooked according to the custom of the country, children tumbling asleep just where they happen to be; in the morning the spiral columns of smoke, the fetching of water, the rather sleepy air with which the housewives go about their affairs. One scene brings back another, and I had seen many such in Zanzibar and in different parts of Arabia.

I was down having a refreshing douche, which Hajj 'Abdullah himself had got ready for me, before six; and well before it was too hot to stay on our roof the boys had brought a good breakfast of well made coffee and fresh bread and two fried eggs each. The first

## THE SULTAN OF AGADES

time we had eaten them since heaven knows when. The most curious thing of all was to eat white bread again. I certainly had had none since Aden days, though in Germany the bread was whiter than in England. The bread of France and Algeria was dark brown, but here the rolls were virgin white. The flour, said 'Abdullah, came from Nigeria. In fact the whole country lived on Nigeria. Round about us as we ate on the roof hopped 'mange mile', elegant, tiny finches. The cock has a scarlet head and breast with a touch of green, and the hen is duller hued, greyish, flecked with yellow.

Breakfast over 'Abdullah guided us in the car to the district office. This was set in a great courtyard and its quite imposing portals opened on to a lofty court, at the back of which was a throne and the tricolour nailed upon the wall. I was taken to M. Brouin who had been expecting our arrival for a considerable time, and was surprised to find he had been equipped in some detail with the story of my past career, so that he well knew of my Arab and French interests. He again was a lover of the nomads and gave me much information of interest. He told me also the names of the district officers right along our route to Fada n Gurma and said what sights we might expect to see upon the way, promising us ostriches in the neighbourhood and much game, possibly even lion, round Fada.

He took me back into the court to introduce me to the Sultan of Agades, a large individual much wrapped in blue 'abas, with an imposing personality. His interpreter spoke admirable Arabic and we stood joking for a few minutes. He asked me if South Arabia was pacified, and was interested when I told him it was coming along that way. Curiously enough he asked about the Subeihi tribe, some of whom come to Nigeria in the skin trade, and I told him that their country was now quite quiet. He was amused at the story of a disreputable section of Subeihi's killing a sciyid who had lost his way in their country because they were short of a saint.

Brouin and I then went out to Doreen who had been making other calls. He took us both into his house for a cognac and soda. It was a nice West African-cum-Moorish type of house, with carpets on the floors, settees and leather saddle bags. There was local work on the walls. Brouin was in the middle of moving both house and

office as it was only a month since the administration changed from military to civil.

He thought all French possessions were probably waiting to see what would happen in Indo-China. It might well end in all the French Colonies wanting independence. He thought it had been a mistake to send Africans to the Paris parliament, but that it would be better if they had their own in Africa. He thought the Conseils Generaux were a step in the right direction.

Doreen went to see the doctor as Leila's eyes were still troublesome. There were swarms of women hanging around at the dispensary with babies tied at their backs. He had two male assistants in clean white aprons, and a girl with coloured print cloth with plaits and many bracelets, handling them. The girl could read and write, and was calling out the names from her book. Each one called had a card with the treatment on it. The doctor told Doreen that they were quite well nourished on their millet, and most of the trouble was eyes and rheumatism and colds in winter. He said there were a lot of fleas but not many lice as the people were comparatively clean.

In the afternoon we collected petrol and Elizabeth and I visited the station garden, where, by familiar methods of irrigation from a well, European and tropical vegetables and fruit grew in some profusion. The gardener gave us limes, and I showed Elizabeth red peppers, pomegranates, citrus trees, pawpaws, castor oil and other old friends which were new and full of interest to her, and we drove back across the landing ground to the old city.

Back on our roof top we watched the inhabitants about their occasions, on the roofs of their huts or talking in clusters. The little boys scampered about, unhindered by clothes; some of the men wore bright yellow and black garments like tartans.

That evening Doreen and I went out to dinner with M. Brouin, meeting there the two ladies of the station and the doctor. It was an evening we both thoroughly enjoyed, the first of many spent in the company of the administrators of the Niger Colony, all of them plainly enthusiasts for their work and the varied peoples among whom they dwelt.

Next morning we were on our way at seven o'clock, guided by



## OSTRICHES AND CRANES

a friendly passer-by through a street in which the most conspicuous feature was a chocolate house, looking for all the world as if it was built of blocks of pure Cadbury and almost inviting one, Hansel and Gretel fashion, to chop bits off. The country through which we passed was very like Somaliland and as we went on the fauna, hour by hour and day by day, became more varied.

We saw our first young ostrich, some three or four feet tall, and African crows with their white waistcoats cawed raucously. They recalled the old Swahili riddle: "All my chickens have white waistcoats. If any haven't white waistcoats they aren't mine." There was no doubt now that we were in Africa, albeit still nomadic. A boy with bow and arrows, travellers with donkeys carrying calabashes of water and food. All these were purely African. Coming down from that part of the continent which gave the name of Africa to the whole, it is odd to find oneself emphasizing that it is the black country which is African. We forget that the first Africans known to Europe were lighter skinned.

We climbed up the great cliff of Tijeddi and continued on through bush, sometimes thicker, sometimes more open. Ostriches, great full-grown ones, became familiar sights. The trees were often overloaded with nests. Long cranes standing by the road side took lazily to flight. Great wide-horned black cattle appeared, looking fierce, but even Zahra and Leila found they could put them to flight. They had an ancient Egyptian look about them, like the cattle of Kismayu. Dogs barked after us. Gaunt monster camels still loomed amongst the thorn trees, whose crooked hands clawed ineffectually at their shaggy scrubby hides. No 'wait a bit' for them, for they find the barbed wire of the acacias succulent fodder. At the wells the boys riding oxen were drawing the water.

All of a sudden the trees appeared taller and thicker. It seemed as though we had stepped over a boundary into a land where water was more plentiful. There were caravans of camels still and donkeys, but also laden cattle with 'gerbas' slung beneath their bellies. Bows and arrows, spears and wide-brimmed hats figured among the equipment of the gentry, and they carried also gourds and bowls and mortars to grind their grain. Sometimes there were women too, generally not so young and naked to the waist with withered breasts, but it

was usually near the wells we saw them. The younger ones had babies on their backs, balancing pots and other household furniture carefully on their heads. Utensils such as these folk had are a common heritage of black Africa where I have seen them south and east and west, but not in the Arab north.

Soon the first signs of sedentary life appeared and in the neighbourhood of Aderbissinet, round the resthouse, were tiny hamlets of round straw huts. Beyond Aderbissinet there was much more greenery, foliage on the trees again and not only thorns. Bird life had long been more abundant. Turtle doves and smaller birds sat indolently on the road almost until they were run over. Black and white hornbills in great numbers, flew awkwardly on their short and bouncing flights from tree to tree, blue bee-eaters, green and yellow sunbirds, delighted our eyes as we entered a region where nature wears much more varied colours.

We stopped for the night after one small ensablément, camping on a slight hill, fairly clear and with a good view over the bush, but unfortunately we had reckoned without the prickly burrs of the neighbourhood. I might have thought of this for they were familiar enough in East Africa and parts of Arabia. The French call them 'cram crams' but their native name seems to be 'Karengia' (*Pennisetum distichium*). It was days before we could get rid of them from our blankets and clothes.

As we lay drinking the welcome tea in the gathering twilight a rider came to our little camp across the burnt grass. He couched his camel and gave us 'Salaam 'aleikum'. I could only see him in silhouette—a tall slim youth with ringlets and a spear, clad in the indigo dress of the country. I replied to his greeting, but he had no Arabic or French and the conversation was no great success. All I learnt was that his speech was Hausa (a tongue which was strange to Kassou too), and he gleaned from us that we came from Agades and were marching on Tanout. He gave it up after a few minutes, and remounting his beast bade us 'Afia' and rode off into the dark, singing cheerfully as he went.

The next day, Friday the 21st of March, we were away early and disturbed several companies of guinea fowl doing P.T. in the middle of the road. There were a few small antelopes about in the bush.

All of a sudden, just near the little resthouse of Eliki, we were astonished to come on a stretch of made road, the first since Tamanrasset, and much better than anything in the Sahara. It was a wide earth road and we hoped that from here on we should bowl comfortably through West Africa on a good surface, but alas for human hopes, it petered out in a mile or so and we were twice ensablé, for the last time of our journey, in the space of half an hour.

Now and then as we breasted rises we were aware of the French genius, perhaps inherited from the Romans, for making long straight roads, and throughout the rest of the journey one would occasionally have views of long sections of road bordered by the African bush, stretching sometimes five or six miles ahead and seeming to run right beyond the horizon.

Giniya, the name of which we learnt from two incomprehensibles after considerable trouble and cross-checking, was a large village of straw huts with little granaries perched on stilts. More and more of the land had been cleared and the dried-up stalks of the last millet crop still stood, for Africa on the whole does not cut its straw. The heads are hand cropped with small knives. Amongst the cultivation was cotton, with some pods still bursting on the bushes. Between the villages and the cultivation were long stretches of bush full of bird life; brilliant blue starlings and large birds standing on the tops of trees, just as Leila draws them. Pedestrians passed up and down the road, many I noticed carrying not only their gourds but also their sleeping mats. Some who wore headdress lifted them, but all saluted with a raised hand. There was an occasional horseman, and here and there a road gang repairing the road. Winding round the slopes of a hill we saw Tanout ahead.

I called at the district office and found that the Commandant was on trek, but his clerk directed us to the new resthouse opposite which was ready for us. Here for the first time I heard someone speak of Tamale for he asked me if I was the Resident of Tamale he expected. The resthouse keeper produced us a lunch of liver and great hot rolls of cassava bread, followed by a curry of rice and mutton. I found out afterwards that it was M. Brachet, the Commandant at Zinder, who, when in charge of the *sub-division* here, had in a moment of whimsical humour presented the 'gardien' of the resthouse with a

register of guests headed 'Hôtel de Damergou', Damergu being the name of the district of which Tanout is the capital. A short preface hoped that visitors would find some comfort in the 'hotel' and asked them to excuse the absence of the luxuries to which they were accustomed. This was signed by the caretaker's name, Arouna, *directeur*.

The speedometer registered 3,496 miles at Tanout, from which had to be subtracted the 595 miles the car had done before we started the journey, and 150 spent in driving round Paris, Marseilles, Algiers, Ghardaia and Agades. I amused myself by working out the remaining mileage of our estimated total at 854. With the distance we had done this seemed nothing, but it is a good deal more than the distance from John O'Groats to Lands End which ordinarily one would consider quite a journey.

During our afternoon's run we passed an increasing amount of settlement. Once we saw a sand devil in the bush. It seemed to feel itself out of place in such surroundings and whirled round madly struggling to extricate itself from the trees.

Someone started singing negro songs, amongst them Swanee River, which made me think that here we were in the midst of a country which had so long been the scene of much of man's inhumanity to man. This was the beginning of that great human reservoir of West Africa from which slave traders, Arab, African, French, Dutch and British had hunted and captured in ruthless fashion the forefathers of these happy folk, rating them as no more than beasts of burden and treating them with less consideration than a wise farmer gives to his stock. From West Africa was drawn much of the population of the West Indies, and the negro slaves of the Arab north. People had already begun to mention to me the names of Woloff and Bambara, two of the West African tribes which had contributed to the black population of Mauritius. It is rather a curious commentary on this man-made transportation of Africans that the descendants of the survivors of those poor folk who had been driven from their homes with fire and sword, some of them not much more than a hundred years ago, are now amongst the more politically minded of the black people of the world, and much nearer to self-government than those who escaped the traders.

We camped, alas, for the last time of our journey, only twenty-

## THOUGHTS ON CAMPING PLACES

eight miles from Zinder, choosing a well cleared place free of the prickly burrs where turtle doves cooed to us evening and morning.

How rarely it is on a journey that one finds the really ideal camping place for a midday or a night halt. If you ask me what is the ideal, it is a combination of all those factors which can refresh the body and delight the eyes, where not only may man eat and sleep in comfort but where thoughts may be attuned to nature yet not disturbed by it. Such a site requires pure water, preferably a rippling stream, green grass and shady trees, a view over the wide desert surrounding your oasis, and an absence of the more tiresome forms of insect life and of thorns. This particular spot possessed not much more than the last requirement, but if you asked me how often in thousands of camping places over nearly thirty years I had found the ideal camping spot, I think they could be numbered on fewer than the fingers of one hand. Perfection is very hard to find in this world, but many a camping place, including those of this journey, had some at least of these requirements and bring back many a pleasant memory. How often have I dragged my weary bones, and worse, those of my protesting companions, 'just round the next corner,' in the hope that the perfect place might appear!

There is a lot of sentiment attached to a camping place, as Imru'l Qais brings out in his great poem of the desert when he describes coming upon the remains of the old camping place of his beloved's tribe with the dried dung of the deer, like seeds of pepper, lying there. But of course Imru'l Qais' sentimental affection for this spot was heightened in that he had shared it with his beloved 'Uneiza.

"Here with a loaf of bread beneath the bough,  
A flask of wine, a book of verse—and thou  
Beside me singing in the wilderness—  
And Wilderness is Paradise enow."

I had six 'Thou-s', but it was only the whistling kettle that sang this night.

We were puzzling over the riddle of Africa, which is the riddle of all so-called backward countries. If we argue that a little more happiness is what we want to put them in the way of achieving, are we going the right way about it? Slavery, violence, disease and death

have been the part of the sons of Cush since history began, and yet are there a happier, merrier people? We want to fill their bellies fuller with food of the right number of calories, with vitamins, proteins and all the rest. Will it really make them happier? We want to educate them, to give them our culture, as they have none of their own in our sense. We want to clothe them, to give them gramophones and wireless. Will they be merrier for it? We want to ventilate their houses and build them septic tanks. Is all this going to give them fuller lives? We want to give them what we call democracy, with parliaments and all the other benefits in which we take such pride ourselves. Will demagogues and elections cheer them more?

Doreen and I, having seen more did more of the talking. Elizabeth, many of whose thoughts centre on what is still to be done in English slums and the mining villages around her home, wondered why we did not clear up our own country first.

I don't think I have paused since 1919 in trying to give more education, decent health conditions, and better social services to the people I have tried to help, but every now and then I find myself sitting down and asking myself questions like this. I remember Philby one night castigating the Iraqi minister after dinner and charging the countries of the green crescent with selling their birth right. The deserts of Saudi Arabia were, he claimed, the only refuge left for a cultured life where leisure was still used properly, and it is true that the right use of leisure is really the test of civilization, not the breathless haste in which we of the west live, creating only more time in which to work and strive. I remember the beduins who, when I preached peace, said that those of the west were odd people to talk about peace when it was they who, in league with the Evil one, created weapons of destruction and slew their millions for the tens killed in blood feuds.

But the truth is that even if it were right we cannot leave these people as they are. Even if we wanted to, they themselves would demand what we are giving, and unless we arm them to deal with the world as it is, the steam roller of the world will remorselessly, relentlessly crush them. It is bound to be so. It is a perversion to say we are bringing them that which leads to destruction. It is not that the things we are giving them lead to destruction. It is that

we are not yet wise enough ourselves to use these things aright. The things we value are the things we are giving them, the great freedoms which we are still striving for ourselves. It is no more than the fulfilling of our duty of neighbours, and they must learn to be good neighbours to us too. The world is now too small to live in fenced enclosures.

Margaret sat silent in all this, thinking it over. She has a world of her own, and now on the threshold of a less sheltered one, there was often a conflict between her discovery of things as they are and her contemplation of them as they ought to be. She wrote afterwards:

"We began to talk about the misery that had burdened the heart of the African for centuries. It is incredibly difficult to know what is essential for their happiness—I think very little, for happiness comes from within ourselves and is not entirely, or even chiefly, dependent on circumstances. That man is truly happy who has charity, but it is one of the hardest things to teach."

And that is true enough, but alas, that gracious inner life she lives, which reminded me sometimes of the life of Virginie as Bernardin de St. Pierre saw it, is far from the world we have to live in, though it is all part of those things we need to work for, for faith must still move mountains. She dwelt alone in these untrodden ways and there we found it hard to follow:

We met a world ago—or yesterday—  
 But now we walk with dreams, close to the brim  
 Of unreality, where ghosts of clay  
 Mingle with living shadows and grow dim.

We have come through stony wastes unkiss'd  
 By shade—wide grave where life dry-withered dies,  
 And longed for evening's cooling amethyst  
 To soothe our thirsty hearts and sun-grieved eyes.

We have gloried in the palm trees' filigree  
 Across the amber chalice of the west,  
 And shared the tawny desert's witchery,  
 Who unclasps emeralds on her pilgrim breast.

FROM THE WELL OF IN ABANGARIT TO AGADES

We have seen the night on tired wings  
Becalm the mighty waste—land lying bare  
Beneath her gaze—and sweet as whispering strings  
Unloose the star-flowers caught up in her hair.

So have we crossed a world together, yet  
We're strangers still, unless the star-lit way  
Of wonder we have journeyed since we met,  
Should find us closer by the falling day.



### Chapter XIII

## WE TURN RIGHT AT ZINDER AND COME TO THE WELL OF RUNZI

*Here fling thyself down on the grassy meadow, O traveller, and rest thy relaxed limbs from painful weariness; since here also, as thou listenest to the cicadas' tune, the stone-pine trembling in the wafts of west wind will lull thee, and the shepherd on the mountains piping at noon nigh the spring under a copse of leafy plane: so escaping the ardours of the autumnal dogstar thou wilt cross the height to-morrow; trust this good counsel that Pan gives thee.*

AUTHOR UNKNOWN.

*Here will we sit and let the sounds of music  
Creep in our ears.*

SHAKESPEARE.

WE were in Zinder just before eight the next morning, having driven over a panorama of open grasslands and fields, tree-sprinkled, with here and there clusters of the little beehive huts, and in the fields the little stilted granaries. Goats, donkeys, much more frequent horses and fewer camels were about the roads, and on the verges passed men and women all with loads, most conspicuously with yellow calabashes on their heads. In one garden these great calabashes were growing, glistening green in the sun, great globes which could furnish many a large coach for Cinderella. New trees appeared, such as borassus palms. Birds flaunted even more brilliant plumage, and I noticed the first lizards I had seen on the journey.

I saw Zinder in the distance on the hillside, a town on a skyline and soon recognized that I was back in the land of corrugated iron. Its buildings were red, but otherwise it reminded me of Nairobi thirty years ago, an untidy ill-built town. At closer acquaintance Zinder was rather better than that. Many of its buildings had the Sudanic Arab character and it had once been the capital of the Niger Colony. Its hotel was good, though the public rooms were large and barnlike, echoing and clattering like any up-country African

## WE TURN RIGHT AT ZINDER

hotel. The ladies who ran it were friendly, chattering incessantly, but clearly carried on a perpetual feud with the District Commissioner. "Charming people up at the *Cercle*, really charming, but they promise you everything and never do anything." M. Brachet, the Commandant, took them philosophically and amusedly: at intervals they threatened to turn everybody into the street and close the hotel.

The Bouzarea trekkers were in the hotel when we arrived, but we were sad not to see the Landing party again. They had proposed to cut out Zinder and go straight to Kano by the old Gangara route. When we had parted from them at Agades Maxwell had enlisted me as a member of a society of trekkers which he hoped to form. I did not think I was qualified as our journey was not half the journey of those going to the Cape, but the qualification apparently was to be that you had driven your car across the Sahara on the way to somewhere or other in Africa! Now we heard that Maxwell had fallen ill on the day of our leaving Agades. Having managed the Sahara before the great heat came they had yet to hurry ahead of the coming rains through the equatorial forest.

We found friendliness and help as usual in the S.A.T.T. garage. The 'patron' kindly stood us a bottle of champagne, but it was sad to part from Kassou, who was to drive a new lorry back to El Golca. Shortly after our arrival our friend the S.A.T.T. driver who had delivered our tyres came into Zinder, bringing the heavy luggage which we had left at Tamanrasset to be brought after us so that we might travel as lightly as possible over the worst part of the journey. This we now re-sorted and repacked the roof of the car.

We could economize much of our other weight, for not only was Kassou leaving us but it would no longer be necessary to carry nearly forty gallons of water. We had eaten a goodly weight of food, and in many ways we began to feel that we were nearing our journey's end. The roads would be better and the load less likely to cause us disaster. No longer was there any fear of having to abandon the car. In Algiers there had been much talk of cars having to be abandoned, though we had only seen the remains of two in the desert. I no longer had to keep to myself the cheerful remark that Le Liépvre had made to me: "Not a year passes but people are found dead of hunger and thirst between Tamanrasset and In Gezzam."

The rest of our way lay through a populated country and in recording what I saw the temptation was no longer to include odd rocks and single trees, but to leave out the many small villages which had an air of impermanence. Nevertheless there was so much of interest that I found my route book soon crowded out with my very nearly illegible pencil writing, written on some of the bumpiest roads on which I had ever been.

I went to see M. Brachet to give him my heartfelt thanks for the tyres he had sent, and to ask him how much I owed for them. I happened to mention that I had not yet had to use them, for by developing an over-sensitive tyre consciousness we had avoided further mishaps. It was only then that I learnt that he had actually sent me one of the tyres off his own car, and he wondered whether, if I could do without it, I would return it. I thought this was one of the most unselfish acts I had known, for tyres are almost unobtainable in French West Africa, so I more than gladly undertook to bring it back. Next morning, however, Brachet was at the hotel saying he had had a telegram from a 'camarade' at Tessaua who was unable to move because two of his tyres had burst, and he asked me not only to take the tyre to him that I was returning but yet another off his own car! I doubt if this generosity had ever been matched by anyone since Hatim Tai had slain his only camel to entertain his guests.

Brachet took me to see the bank manager to change my Algerian francs to the more expensive ones of West Africa. The bank manager talked fondly of the desert route before the war, and I found that many of the officers in the Niger Colony and their families travelled regularly on the desert by car, or over it by air, when going on leave or returning to duty. They generally travelled by the S.A.T.T. bus, though quite a lot used Trans-Saharien on the shorter but much less interesting Bidon Cinq route.

We dined with the Brachets that night, meeting their two little adopted girls whose fathers were Frenchmen and mothers Tuareg. They had also a little boy of their own. We talked on the terrace in front of the Residency surrounded by flowers and later on they took us to a dance at the club. It was a simple sort of country club, but it interested me that the committee was entirely composed of

women. The president was the colonel's wife. Elections to the committee took place during the evening. Hitherto, we learnt, N.C.O.s had been excluded from the club, but, much to her pleasure, a motion was also adopted that they should be allowed to join. The colonel's wife conducted all this formal business in a charming manner from the dance floor. She certainly had a way with her, making the best use of her stage and seeming to address everyone individually. Ballot papers were passed round as she talked and having watched her, I felt that if our colonial clubs were run on similar lines I should be much happier to join them.

We drank champagne while the world danced; they were all officials except for our dashing chauffeur friend of the tyres, officers of the garrison in their smart Zouave trousers, and their wives. The Brachets did not dance and were interested to find by judicious questions that we, like them, did not play bridge either. He and his wife were, like others, lovers of a nomadic life amongst the nomadic Tuareg, and much preferred that to a station life in a small garrison town, though, as he said, he had now to undertake with a good grace social duties for which he felt no inclination. He, as well as Brouin and others we were to meet, spoke so highly of their colleagues and were so obviously devoted admirers of their Governor, M. Toby—"You wait till you meet our Governor"—that I felt the Niger was blessed with a particularly happy and well-knit team, working closely together for the welfare of the different tribes of Africans, each of which had its devoted adherents amongst them.

On Sunday, after lunch in the hotel, we went out with Kassou to pack the car, in just the normal way. When it was finished it seemed strange and sad that we now had to drive off without him, and it was a long time till we got used to the absence of him and his great 'aba from the car. It seemed so inadequate that we could make no more of a good-bye than a handshake and thanks, however warm. I gave him letters to M. Estienne and M. Wasmer containing warm recommendations and an envelope for himself. "In the peace of God" were his last words and we waved till he was out of sight.

Soon after we left the hotel we reached another blue enamel sign-post. One arm pointed straight on to Lake Chad, while another pointed right to Tessaua 117, Megaria 159, Kano 279, Niamey 925,

Gao 1,393. Thus we left a road which we had followed for over 2,000 miles to follow a side street, as it were, for nearly another 1,000. Two pillars of red mud marked the limits of the town, between which the red bush-lined road ran westwards with the setting sun gradually sinking before us. It shone into our eyes every afternoon, and each evening we chased this great red ball sinking below the horizon ahead. For the next 913 miles to Wagadugu we were travelling westwards between latitudes 12° and 14°, and therefore in very much the same type of country.

For the first time since we had left Ghardaia telephone lines ran beside us. Strange red boulders heaped themselves along the roads, and small kopjes covered with them raised themselves from the bush. Pandanus palms appeared and continued as a frequent feature of the landscape. The thorn trees were now practically finished. Other small deciduous trees took their place with leaves now hanging dry, but there was much more green about. Horsemen in white robes with wide brimmed hats passed by us. They suggested a Klu Klux Klan in cowboy hats. Whenever we stopped the shrilling of crickets fell upon our ears, and in one little village a covey of small black pigs, which delighted the children, dashed for shelter.

Little villages, each with their granaries, succeeded one another in clearings in the bush. Round them were tethered horses, as camels had been before. In the early afternoon we saw women outside their huts pounding the grain for the evening meal in the great wooden mortars, such a feature of Africa. As night fell we passed others and now evening fires glowed in each tiny hamlet. The good folk were sitting round their pots to eat and raised their hands in friendly salute as we passed.

We came to Tessaua a little after dark and were met by M. Pietrantoni, a bearded Corsican, who led us to the resthouse and told us that Mme. Piozun hoped we would dine with her and with him. He was about to go on leave and her husband, his relief, was already out on tour. These French West African resthouses, in any station where there was a District Officer, always had more than enough beds for our large party, and most of the bedrooms had a simple mud bathroom with a shower bucket suspended from a rafter.

Mme. Piozun had just come from Niamey, glad for the sake of

her children to be in a drier climate, for she said that Niamey had too much malaria. They were always well in this dry bush where mosquito nets were hardly necessary. Throughout French West Africa I had the sense of meeting people in their homes. The French make homes in West Africa much more easily than we do. They almost always had their children with them. Their houses, built in the style of the country and not to the fancies of an enterprising District Commissioner on whose shoulders the roles of architect and engineer had been thrust with many others, were good to look at and made full use in their decoration and furnishings of African art.

We had intended to go as far as Madaua next day, but in the event got no further than Maradi, which we reached at midday, driving for some miles through avenues of a species of euphorbia used as a dust break to the roads.

A dusty harmattan mist brooded over everything to-day. The sky seemed full of it and it partially obscured the sun, though it did nothing to cool it. Scenery changed gradually and it was only after a certain time that one realized how much had altered in its composition. There were, however, two very pleasant new things: there were patches of the bare earth sprinkled with a chrome-yellow flower, never more than two or three inches high, which was as big as a frangi-pani blossom and similarly shaped, though it had not its sweet smell, and there were glorious Cassia trees in the bush, drenched with heavy yellow clusters like laburnum. During the rest of the trip we tried sometimes to have a meal under one of these lovely trees, through which the light filtered softly.

The houses were still woven and thatched with straw, but instead of each dwelling having its own palisade several groups were enclosed by one, sometimes even the entire village would be palisaded. Within them we had glimpses of women pounding millet and weaving mats. I wondered idly how many women there are in Africa pounding millet at a given hour, just as I have wondered in England how many women are hanging up washing on Monday mornings. These African 'Hausfraus' were mostly dressed in bright patterned cloth, and emanated a general air of cheerfulness which infected even passers-by like us. Throughout the length of this long road there were gangs working and we met some of them cheerfully dancing

along the dusty road. Where else do you see labourers dancing to their work?

We stopped to talk to an African English-speaking driver from Port Harcourt who had been in many parts of the world, including South America and Mombasa. Just outside Maradi he passed us again and stopped to lead us in, for Maradi lies off the Niamey road. He led us, however, to the traders' quarter, but it was not far from the resthouse, and when we had deposited the family and the baggage Elizabeth drove me up to the District Officer, M. Even, in the hope of catching him before he left and obtaining a 'bon' for the petrol we needed to take us to Niamey. He was away on tour but I found M. Leroux, the magistrate. Mme. Even and he had made elaborate arrangements for housing the family in a spare house and for our lunch, but they excused us from taking advantage of their kindness because, as I explained, we were such a crowd and not only late but deplorably dirty.

After lunch we set out again to fetch the 'bon.' The car, however, would not start and the willing help of half a dozen chauffeurs standing round failed completely to get a reasonable spark of life into it. Finally we heard of a good French mechanic of the Niger Company near by. I had sent an apology to M. Leroux for the delay and explained that we would have to stay there for the night after all. We had no sooner been pushed by a happy helpful crowd of Africans half a mile to the garage when letters came from M. Leroux and Mme. Even invoking every help on our behalf and inviting us to dinner. Evening was upon us, and as there was no electricity in Maradi work on the car had to be postponed till the next morning.

M. Even returned from his tour during the afternoon and sent down the station car for us, a Dodge wagon just like that in which we had climbed to Sana' years before. It was a largish dinner party of which my chief recollection was the delicious carp caught by the District Engineer in a lake some twenty kilometres away. Much of the talk here as elsewhere centred round the difficult political time that was coming upon West Africa, where now all the natives had votes, and it was felt that it would need courage and wise judgement to steer the country along the path of progress at the much more rapid tempo which the impact of world affairs demanded. Here

and in other places I found a great realization of the need that England and France should work together in the common problems of West Africa, and do all that could be done to keep its peoples with us in Europe. There was everywhere a fear that the more undesirable kinds of politics might spread.

I often thought of these conversations as we went along the road, wondering if the crowds of simple, polite peasants passing on their various occasions could really be bothering about any politics, yet had a feeling that, even in these traditional surroundings, where little had visibly changed since peace had been brought to them by Europe, quite imperceptibly, Africa was stirring. So, sometimes, the surface of the sea is calm for a little while, and then, at first, reflects only by ripples some great upheaval that is taking place beneath.

Elizabeth and I were at the garage very early in the morning. The engineer had stripped the carburettor to which, by a process of elimination, he had traced the trouble. The governor was broken. Margaret too had risen early and taken the children for a walk. They had wandered through the woods in the early morning air perfumed, she said, with a lovely scent. They collected strange objects of wonder, especially a large orange fruit with points all over its skin which looked rather like a lobster. They saw neat little gardens planted with rows of millet, lettuce, and cabbages.

We got away finally at ten o'clock, making for Madaua, and by taking the wrong turning we went ten miles along an old track by the village of Tibiri before we found the main road.

At noon, having done just about fifty miles, we started looking for a good place to lunch. To-day we were lucky. We saw a large tree by the wayside whose leafy branches invited us to rest in its shade. By it was a well called Runzi, and as we drove the car beneath the tree a kindly woman drawing water stepped forward with a calabash and filled our kettle and our gerba. We lunched coolly and refreshingly in this peaceful spot: the varied trees around stood almost still in the quivering noontide heat. Now and then a tiny rustle of a breeze played around them and us, and almost the only sounds as we drank our tea and smoked were the buzzing of flies and the crooning of turtle doves. A demure little jenny donkey stood patiently waiting by the well, round which butterflies and doves



## IDYLL AT A WELL

drank from the splash and mason wasps industriously collected mud to build their houses. Then came two lads with another donkey. One watered the two beasts from a calabash while the other drew tinkling music, like the splashing of the water in the well, from a tiny mandoline made mostly from a sardine tin. The tuneful melodies of this African Pan were a fitting accompaniment of the little breezes which invited us to sleep rather than to carry on into the hot and dusty afternoon.

Later we stopped again for tea under a tree, being very thirsty. Nearby were some women spinning long lengths of cotton on a 'walk' like those on which the Arabs spin coir ropes. Just before dark we came to a very large village with vast crowds of people buying and selling. It was clearly market day for there were many horse-men about and along the road shoppers returning home. We thought it might be Madaua but one of the horsemen told us it was Setinagi.

Two miles further on we reached the resthouse of Madaua where a table stood ready spread on the terrace, and we drank the welcome, clean, cold water poured out for us. Presently a letter of invitation came from M. Voigtlin, the Commandant, and Doreen and I went off to dine with this charming young Alsatian couple who keep their own camels and go trekking together in the bush. Camels were really, as he explained, rather out of place in that country, but he too had spent time with the nomads and had fallen under their spell.

## Chapter XIV

### WE REACH THE NIGER.

*Teach us Delight in simple things,  
And Mirth that has no bitter springs;  
Forgiveness free of evil done,  
And Love to all men 'neath the sun!*

KIPLING.

*There is a certain relief in change, even though it be from bad to worse; as I have found in travelling in a stage-coach, that it is often a comfort to shift one's position and be bruised in a new place.*

WASHINGTON IRVING.

*They readily agreed to introduce me to the king; and we rode together through some marshy ground, where, as I was anxiously looking around for the river, one of them called out, *geo affili* (see the water), and looking forwards I saw with infinite pleasure the great object of my mission—the long-sought-for, majestic Niger, glittering to the morning sun, as broad as the Thames at Westminster, and flowing slowly to the eastward. I hastened to the brink, and, having drank of the water, lifted up my fervent thanks in prayer to the Great Ruler of all things, for having thus far crowned my endeavours with success.*

MUNGO PARK.

Our next stage on the way to the Niger was Birni n Koui. It no longer seemed such a long way because for the last two days people had ceased to talk of the Niger but spoke of 'Le Fleuve'.

The scene was the same, open bush country, the dusty grey greens of the African bush, burnt grass, the red earth or stretches of open rolling red prairies, or downs with little beehive villages planted out on their slopes. Had it not been for the constant traffic of pedestrians and riders on gaily caparisoned horses with blue and red leather saddles in this populous region, one might have thought it was a giants' country for you could not see the little straw skeps of huts without thinking that giants must have planted them out in their groups. One expected to see bees as big as birds buzzing round the flowers. The illusion was heightened to-day by the appearance of granaries of clay, shaped like great water pots, in which a giant robber

chief could easily have sheltered many more than forty giant thieves. Some of these clay granaries were of mud and mat combined with straw roofs like Chinamen's hats, giant editions of those which the people wore.

The road wound on up and down, following the contours, and in the bush turquoise-blue kingfishers flashed like brilliant streaks of lightning from tree to tree. Cattle browsing by the roadside and goats capering across it abounded. On the backs of the former there were now often white cattle egrets picking off the ticks.

At Birni n Koni we found that M. Rozé, the Commandant, was away in the bush, but Vaissier, his *adjoint*, came out into the road to meet us, taking us to an unoccupied house, which awaited the arrival of a new magistrate. Here the hospitable staff of the station had arranged a pleasant lunch for us. Bottles of cold water invitingly flanking one of cognac stood on the table, but it was the former that always attracted us in almost unlimited quantities, though sometimes we fell for the refreshing addition of red wine. The room was gay with the coloured woven mats and the dyed leather of the country. The house was built of the picturesque red mud and of good design, but the finish was rougher than would have passed with Hadhramaut craftsmen.

These stations, always well laid out, were a riot of the flowering trees of the country, brilliant flamboyants, tulip trees, shady mangoes, or curtained with soft yellow laburnums. Among them the red houses, with their white-washed interiors, glowed decoratively and always seemed cool to enter.

Vaissier was, like all his compatriots, a charming host, understanding well the needs of dusty, thirsty travellers, and he had in addition a whimsical humour, referring to West Africa as the kingdom of wire and string where everything had to be improvized and transport was so ancient that it barely held together. This sort of thing was very familiar to me, though I could not help feeling that the good folk who looked after us and who were so short of supplies, were often depriving themselves to entertain us.

Clean and refreshed we started off for Dogo n Dutchi in the sultry afternoon to collect our next layer of dust. On these afternoons we were often almost the only creatures astir. The French wisely

stick to the siesta which is the rule here for all creation. Under trees along the road you saw men, beasts and birds seeking shade and taking rest. This afternoon, for instance, standing alone at the foot of the trunk of one tree was a hoopoe with its mouth open. Under another a few yards on were three crested plovers standing each on one leg. On the other side of the road under a third were six Africans. Here and there a tree sheltered a donkey or two, a few goats or a few cattle.

As we descended towards the Niger valley the monotony of those long straight stretches of road was occasionally broken. There was a distant panorama of isolated hills standing scattered in the bush, and looking like the hills of the desert jöls, though themselves all clad with bush: in the foreground a bridge spanned a valley with weeping laburnums hanging over it and trees with copper-coloured foliage—an African version of the willow pattern story. After four o'clock Africa had finished with siesta. We saw some antelopes, an unusual sight these days, camels and spearmen.

We walked—it was I who proposed it, the rest not too happily agreeing—some two hundred yards off the road, so that we could have our tea under the cool yellow light of a laburnum. Doreen started back to the car ahead of us, but when we got there there was no sign of her. We waited some minutes and then began an anxious search, calling in vain with only the turtle doves to answer. At last we found her wearily wandering, for she had lost her way. Although the tree was easily seen from the road, the road was often invisible from a few yards off.

As the speedometer turned to 4,000 night began to enshroud us in the African bush, and a little later we reached the resthouse at Dogo n Dutchi. It was well and comfortably built with water laid on, including modern sanitation. M. Plagnol, one of the older administrators of the Niger Colony, soon came to meet us, and insisted on carrying the whole family off to dinner at the Residency. The evening developed into one of the most delightful of our journey, for Mme. Plagnol and he were old and experienced Africans who had rejected every blandishment to migrate to the bigger centres. They loved the bush and its life and its people. Mme. Plagnol was also an artist, and her portraits of African types showed a vivid insight into the character of the sitters.

They had a daughter Annie, a girl of fourteen who had been brought up in the bush, and staying with her was a young friend of about the same age from Niamey. Annie, it appeared, had almost grown up on horseback and hunted and roamed the bush at will. She and her young friend were certainly advertisements for the healthiness of a West African life. I suppose the climate of much of the Niger Colony must be better than that of our colonies for what we were seeing of French West Africa could never have been regarded as a white man's grave. Here the women shared the life of their husbands to the full, travelling with them on their journeys and bringing up their children in the bush. Dakar, we learnt, provided higher education for French children, similar to that provided in France. It was a very pleasant party sitting there at two tables, the children at one and the grown-ups at the other, and the talk of our host was full of interest on the life of the country and the growing up of Africa, as they had seen it during their long years of service.

The S.A.T.T. bus from Niamey to Zinder drew up outside the resthouse as we were preparing to start in the morning. A young officer in the usual Zouave trousers—a grand-looking chap—asked me what sort of place it was. I told him that we had only arrived the night before and were just off. Seeing the G.B. on the car he said: "But you're not English, are you?" I confessed I was and asked him where he was going. He said Zinder. Had I been there, and were there any women in the place? I said I had met several charming ones. This depressed him enormously, but he shrugged his shoulders and said he would just have to try to get into some out-post somewhere. He thought women ruined these places. He was another desert lover and no admirer of metropolitan politics. "They're grand people, these," he said, waving his hand in the direction of a number of Africans crowded round the bus, "but it's absurd *thinking* of them as Frenchmen. Look at them all, they've all got votes now. Get French politics into this place and it'll be ruined." The bus was getting ready to go. Shaking hands warmly and waving a cheery good-bye he ran off.

As we left for the day's run which was to bring us to Niamey at night, we had no difficulty in distinguishing the colossal rock which the Plagnols called Queen Victoria, for it was an unmistakable

likeness in heroic proportions of the old Queen in her later years. We only saw the back view, but the widow's bonnet with its black veil was quite clear.

Day after day of travelling through the bush makes monotonous telling, but it brought its immensity home as nothing else could do, and forced comparisons with the immensity of the desert. I was more convinced than ever of the conclusions which had grown upon me in East Africa many years ago. I could feel again the effect of his surroundings on the mind of man, and recognize the unmistakable way in which environment moulds the religious instinct present in every human being.

In the wide open spaces of the sands and barren rocks, where the endless procession of heaven is the only thing that changes, man is brought inevitably and inexorably to know the existence of the one God, to Whose infinite greatness and mercy he can only submit himself and his tiny affairs. In the bush it is far otherwise. Here his vision is cramped, indeed in the forest he scarcely sees the skies. Nature, in a multi-thousand forms, brings every sort of influence to bear on him and his, many of them harmful to human wellbeing. In the dark the million voices and unseen presences of the night whisper unimagined terrors to the puny heart of man. What wonder that he seeks to appease the infinite number of spirits which lurk in trees and rocks and springs, whence come the diseases which bring him his misery.

With all of us, the happiness which the human soul needs and demands depends to a very large extent on health. Yet unhappiness is not the dominant factor in an African's life, only perhaps the unconscious fear of it. I suspect the African feels instinctively the needs which we feel by education.

Here life is uncomfortable to us in many ways, the heat, the dust, the thorns, the million tiresome insects. Yet on this journey, which was after all tiresome and uncomfortable, all this impressed upon me in a way nothing else could have done the incalculable value of simple things, the joy in the glorious clean simplicity of the yellow-robed laburnums, the uplift at the flash of a turquoise wing, the pleasure in an African idyll such as we had known at the well at Runzi. I had mentioned our lunching there to Plagnol and his quick glance in

response and the equal delight which he and his wife had plainly taken in the spot, proclaimed them as kindred spirits. It is always a joy to recognize others who share one's feelings, especially when it is almost impossible to give expression to them.

I noticed to-day how trees were bigger in this lower, better-watered region. There were giant baobabs and great shady trees, and in it all the great African ant hills became a common feature of the way. Here and there new bush had been cleared for planting. Trees were cut down and their branches piled around the stumps so that they might be burnt. I wondered whether this was the natural practice of the African or whether he had been taught it. The sides of the road often bore traces of a wantonly destructive spirit in the burnt and broken trees, for primitive man is untidy when left to himself, but this looked more orderly. The French administrative officers were strict about bush burning, which is the cause of much soil erosion, but of course they could not check it entirely.

At the yellow station of Dosso, planted with cassias in the midst of white buildings, we lunched in the resthouse for the Commandant was away on tour. I think our afternoon run to Niamey was one of the worst of the whole journey for the red laterite road was almost continuously corrugated. Corrugated roads were one of our greatest discomforts and here, they were worse than in the open desert, where there was often a chance of finding an alternative way. Hedged in by bush there was no escape.

We had bumped and banged our way across Africa. The constant crashes of the car's artillery deafened us. To all the clattering tinware, the birthright of a Ford, was added a concatenation of tumbling tins, cups, kettles, sauce- and frying-pans, enamel ware, knives, forks, spoons, bucket, lamps and primus stove. The crashing of castanets, cymbals and tambourines in a percussion piece by Bela Bartok was nothing to it. Everything in the car that could make a noise came to life and made it. The din was deafening, and the pain of our bumped, beaten, bruised and battered bottoms, reduced us to misery as we bounced along this awful stretch of road. The insufficiently upholstered seats seemed no better than bare boards and the brief bliss of a mile or two smooth going was almost unbelievable.

We were thirteen miles out of Niamey when we were met by a

## WE REACH THE NIGER

car in which was M. Heude, Commandant designate of Dosso, who had been asked by M. Toby, the Governor, to come out and meet us. He invited me to ride with him, and this was the only little part of our journey which I did not cover in our own car. Four miles out of Niamey, when dusk had well fallen, we had our first view of the Niger, a wide expanse of water flowing calm and smooth through the heart of West Africa.

When you travel, on a journey like ours, seven people in a station wagon, you are, to say the least, crowded and heavy laden, but even so you travel light with limited wardrobe. You get inexpressibly dirty, and after many a day of camping and living as part of the desert and bush, you feel a certain reluctance at the thought of approaching the places of the great, or indeed even any respectable household. I could not help, therefore, worrying at the thought of such a party being taken in to His Excellency's Residence, and this increased as I saw the lofty Moorish palace to which we were being rapidly driven. When I entered I felt very much as the beduins feel when they come into the great houses we had known in Arabia; all their instincts are to get out of it and back into the open they know. I need not really have worried for the charm and warmth of our host's welcome soon dispelled these thoughts, leaving only a feeling that the size of our invasion was more than it ought to be.

While the family settled into the comfortable quarters prepared for them, His Excellency took me on to the terrace, plying me with cool refreshing drinks. I have a weakness for French apéritifs and this often surprised my hosts who would apologize for the absence of whisky. I had remarked to one of them that the beauty of the Anglo-French borderlands must be that one could have the best of both worlds: British beer and whisky and French apéritifs and wines, but it seemed that in these days of shortages it was very hard for our French friends to come by the Scotch whisky which they enjoyed as much as any Scotsman, for they told me that whisky and beef were rationed in the British colonies, though I was glad to hear that there was many a British District Commissioner who shared his ration with his French opposite number.

I wish we could do more to help our neighbours in these interior parts by passing over some of the supplies we have, for though we



are short ourselves we are not nearly as short as they are. They were short of lamps, short of shoes, and the ladies were terribly short of frocks. They were short of wine and short, in a word, of all things which one must realize go to make for comfort and contentment to those whose lot is cast in faraway places. Yet it was very difficult to find out their shortages, and they gave to us of their little stocks in unstinting measure.

The night of our arrival M. Toby had a dinner party, which included two medical Colonels, one of them the Principal Medical Officer of the Colony and the other Colonel de Rouzic, the sleeping sickness king, and M. Heude, who had led us into Niamey, was also there. The brilliant electric light and the white napery, in the centre of which were heaped red banks of frangi-pani and bougainvillea, were as refreshing to the eyes as a green oasis in the desert. After dinner, to my surprise and I admit dismay, for I realized it involved an impromptu reply, he made us a charming speech of welcome, sending his greetings to the Governor of the Gold Coast, referring to the long and happy association of French and British in West Africa, and speaking of the great need for the closest co-operation in the future between us. Finally he raised his glass to the health of His Majesty and to our own. In answer I expressed some of the thanks we felt to him and his great team of Niger administrators. I said how much of my service had been spent in happy proximity to and association with the French, in Mauritius, in Aden and in Berlin, and I said with what great pleasure I looked forward to a fruitful period of working with colleagues as good as those whom we had met on the way.

Next day Elizabeth and I were out soon after breakfast to see to our needs for the rest of the journey, to send off telegrams announcing our arrival, and to call on M. Colombani, the District Officer of the Niamey 'Cercle'. He was another Corsican, but he was also a French Canadian, and as such had a double nationality, and I claimed him therefore not only as a colleague but as a compatriot. We talked a good deal of the colonial service. I had always understood from French friends that the best of the French remained at home as they did not nearly so easily expatriate themselves as we did. With us, the Scots particularly, are an Empire going race. There is hardly a

ship in which you sail in which the engineers are not Scots; there is hardly a medical department in a colony not staffed to a large extent by Scotsmen. It had seemed to me that the quality of Frenchmen administering the Niger was very high indeed. Colombani told me that recruitment was very largely limited to certain parts of France. Corsica supplied a large number and the rest came largely from Brittany and Normandy. Brittany of course has bred many great administrators and sea-going folk. I remembered Mahé de la Bourdonnais, the great Breton who had built Mauritius and conquered Madras with a navy built and manned in the island. His statue stood dressed in eighteenth century costume on the quay of Port Louis, and I never passed it without raising my hat to him. In Mauritius, too, there were still descendants of that stalwart foe Surcouf and his corsairs.

A nation possessing sons with such blood as this can always be sure of great administrators in its overseas Empire. M. Toby himself was a Breton in the mould of La Bourdonnais. He was a bachelor with a mother and home near Brest. One of the reasons for which I admired La Bourdonnais was that though a man of great dignity he was never afraid to take off his coat and himself superintend the building of the city of Port Louis. It is told of him that on one day, hot after standing for hours in the heat of the sun, he had retired to a neighbouring pool to refresh himself with a bathe. While he disported himself in the water a stag investigated his clothes hanging on a bush and galloped off with His Excellency's breeches entangled in its antlers. Such a predicament might have daunted a lesser man than La Bourdonnais, but on emerging from the pool he calmly donned his underpants, his full dress coat, which a governor wore on all occasions in those days, his cocked hat and the grand cordon of the Order of St. Louis. Thus wondrously attired His Excellency returned to supervise his building operations. So remarkable was the discipline of his people that not one dared raise even a smile. Probably no such dilemma has confronted M. Toby, but even if it did I feel he would surmount it with the same aplomb.

I have said how his officers had promised me a treat in meeting this great Nigerian, who has spent all his career in the service of France and the Niger folk. There was a kind of boyish eagerness about

him when he spoke of those I had met on the way. "Whom did you see at Agades, at Zinder?" He wanted to know how they were in each station. He had a comment for all. "Ah, yes, the little Alsatian." "Ah, yes, he is a great fellow," and he wanted to know what I thought of them all. When I had told him he said with deep satisfaction "Oui, j'ai un bon équipe." It was a great thing to see such a strong team feeling between a captain and his side.

Governor Toby was a keen gardener and it was an undreamt of treat to be given strawberries for dinner. After four he took me out to see his garden and I saw the flourishing strawberry beds for myself, many other fruit trees which he had imported, and mangoes which he grafted himself. Then I went with him for a drive some distance up the Timbuktu road. He was vastly amused at the interest the English showed in Timbuktu and said later to Doreen that there was nothing remarkable about the place except perhaps the curiosity of the English in regard to it. He said that of our large party I could certainly claim to have been nearest to it. He told me as we drove along the river side that he was expecting the visit of the President of the Republic. He thought that it would be too hot for an old gentleman in April, and was concerned at what he could show him without exhausting him.

M. Toby was very pleased with his new 'conseil general,' and told me that they had, at their first session, doubled the vote proposed for, I think, either education or health. He thought these 'conseils generaux' were going to be much more important than the deputies sent to France. In all French West Africa there are only about 50,000 electors with a very limited franchise, and they send six deputies to Paris. When we passed through the Niger it was one of seven colonies in French West Africa. There had formerly been eight and I heard that the old Haute Volta colony, through which we were also to pass, was shortly to be revived.

On this drive I could see that Governor Toby was very much the father of his flock. He had a cheery wave for the children, who obviously had an affection for him, and he referred to the people as '*Ces braves gens*.' He knew the names of the birds and of the trees, and he knew and loved the mighty river along which we drove.

A few years ago Niamey was only a tiny village, and the Governor

## WE REACH THE NIGER

is engaged on building a new Niamey, just as La Bourdonnais built Port Louis. Shortage of materials means the task goes on slowly, but the new town is all planned. Some foundations are laid, and here and there the walls grow.

We slept at night on the roof of the palace and it was one of those unforgettable awakenings to rise in the cool of the early morning and see the great smooth stretch of the Niger calm before us, for at this season, though it is about eight hundred yards across, there is hardly a ripple or sign of current. Lordly, indeed, it flowed in a wide landscape, for on the further bank there stretched unchanged as far as the eye could see, the primeval African bush. This was the sight which had greeted the eyes of Mungo Park, and I thought of all those early explorers of whom Governor Toby had spoken to me the evening before as I gazed on this peaceful and impressive sight.

## Chapter XV

### WAGADUGU AT LAST

*Among all this, that which interested the King more was what Bemoy said about some Kings and Princes of those parts, mainly of one whom he called the King of the peoples of Moses (the Mossi), whose state began beyond Timbuktu and extended towards the Orient,—a King neither Moor nor gentile, with customs in many ways like those of Christian peoples. From this the King concluded that he was the Preste Joao, whom he so eagerly wished to reach.*

JOAO DE BARROS.

EARLY on the morning of the 29th of March we drove down to the river bank to take the ferry, which had been arranged for seven o'clock. It has no regular times and if you are on the wrong side and want it urgently the only thing to do is to fire a shot. The ferry consisted of five boats decked over as a raft and was propelled by a small outboard motor. It took a quarter of an hour to cross.

The river flowed cool and peaceful in the fresh morning air between its tree-fringed banks on which there were many people; small boys on laden donkeys, women carrying water jars and gourds, herdsmen watering their stock and boys washing cars. It was a pleasant crossing and the third time on our long journey that our car was on the water. Crossing the Niger seemed in many ways to mark a stage, but though we were now moving more southwards were still on a westward course. There was little that was fresh about the scenery as we drove off for Fada n Gurma; but through some of the villages large shade trees reaching over the road made a pleasant change. There was a lovely valley of *Cassia sieberiana* and near the villages there were barrel hives, just like the Kikuyu have in East Africa, hung in the baobab trees.

We lunched at Kantchari where our thoughtful hosts had sent word ahead so that we found the resthouse clean and swept and ready for our use. There was no District Officer here, but the local

## WAGADUGU AT LAST

celebrities, the robed chief who wore dark glasses, the teacher, the postman and the policeman came to shake us by the hand and bid us welcome.

The children, and indeed I think most of us, were keyed up hoping to see the lions and the big game we had been promised, but we were unlucky. It was dark before we got to Fada n Gurma and just once I saw a pair of shining eyes in the bush at the side of the road, though what animal they belonged to I could not say. In one place a large bush fire rushed along by the side of the road, like a dragon breathing fire.

Some miles out we met M. Goutal who, uneasy at our late arrival, had come to see what had happened to us. Elizabeth and Margaret went to stay with the wife of his assistant while he put up the rest of us. His wife was away and it must have been considerable trouble to him to have such a band, but nothing could have been kinder than the welcome he gave us.

We were off next morning early for Wagadugu, the place with the name which had so amused us in England and which had formed the theme of the children's chorus over several thousand miles. We were once again headed south, cutting across different types of African country.

In thirty-nine miles from Fada n Gurma we came to the boundary of the Niger and the Côte d'Ivoire colonies, where each side of the stone boundary posts gave a table of distances. In our direction were:

Wagadugu	170
Bamoko	1098
Abidjan	1405
Dakar	2375

Back the way we had come were:

Fada n Gurma	60
Niamey	357
Lake Chad	1882
Algiers	3508

Of course we had come a good deal more than 3,508 kilometres from Algiers, but that distance was via Gao and the Tanezruft, the Bidon Cinq route.

## THE CIRCUS PUTS UP IN THE HOSPITAL

At Zorgo I think the family would happily have got out and bathed in a large roadside pool, the first of the kind we had seen, where many of the younger inhabitants of the large village disported themselves mother-nude in the water. Nudism was indeed becoming more common and we began to see both men and women with very little on. We reached the resthouse of Kupila quite early, and spent an hour or so there making and drinking coffee. It is a large Christian village, and as it was Palm Sunday there were crowds carrying branches round the mud-built church. The worshippers were naked or almost so with little on beyond a cross round their necks.

We lunched under a shady tree from which hung red pompoms on long strings. I learnt later that it was the daudawa tree (*Parkia filicoides*). The children found other odd and coloured fruits which would have done well as decorations to a Christmas tree. Then we came to and crossed over the dry bed of the White Volta, where there were only pools of green slime, and as evening drew on reached the wide streets of Wagadugu with large white buildings in big gardens. A policeman posted for the purpose pointed our way to us. I was told afterwards that though he had well recognized that his mission was completed he had no idea of quitting his post, and would probably have been there still if he had not been told to withdraw. This was remarked on as typically African, but so much that is said to be typically African you find is just as typically European. Remember, for example, Q's story of a sentry posted by the orders of a Russian Empress to guard a violet. The posting of the sentry in the middle of an open field long outlived the violet and the Empress.

M. Robaglia, the District Officer of Po, was in Wagadugu and he led us to the quarters which had been prepared for us in the hospital. Wagadugu was exceptionally full that night as an 'ancien ministre' and other visitors had descended by air on the Administrateur Supérieur, but we could not have had cleaner and better quarters, and the hospital authorities described it as 'tout à fait normal' that we should use their hospital as a hotel. The boys were kindness itself and did everything to meet our simple wants, though I regret to say that such was the thirst of the family that we completely drained the hospital dry of cold water, and water is a scarce commodity in Wagadugu and has to be fetched.

## WAGADUGU AT LAST

I was only half dressed when the cheerful, welcoming M. Poli, the Administrateur Supérieur burst in to bid us welcome and demand that we *all* come to dinner. This I successfully resisted for he had a great many other guests, and the long table to which Doreen and I eventually sat down accommodated the largest party we had had on our journey. In this cheerful and hospitable house, where Mme. Poli was a most entertaining hostess, we met many of the local officials as well as Maître Laminegeye, the former minister, who was now Mayor of Dakar. He had been dining at Government House, Accra, the night before.

We also met the Moronaba, whom Poli introduced to me as 'the Emperor of the Mossi.' He was dressed in what were plainly Arab robes but was bareheaded. He had great dignity and wore on his gown the Legion of Honour. He belongs to a thousand-year-old dynasty and one of his ancestors was believed by the Portuguese to be Prester John. The Moronaba is the religious head of a great pagan people and M. Poli told me that he had about a million followers, and that his religious powers were great.

The Mossi are an ancient warrior race which raided far and wide but never sought territorial expansion. There were at a time two Mossi kingdoms existing side by side, of which Wagadugu was the capital of one—the Ubritenga. The Mossi have a common origin with three of the little kingdoms of the Northern Territories, the Mamprusi, the Dagomba and the Wala. The Mamprusi is the senior of them all, and I believe that even now when a new Mamprusi king, called Nayiri, succeeds, the Moronaba sends tribute in the form of some ceremonial present. Yet the Mossi have a far better known history than the Mamprusi, and when I met the Nayiri later I found it difficult to appreciate that he could be regarded in any way as more important than the Moronaba, a man of presence and education. Yet the Moronaba has no temporal powers at all. Poli told me that while he was treated with great respect he was not consulted in matters of administration.

I imagine indirect rulers would not think very much of this, and I don't know that I do either from what I have heard of the successes of indirect rule. But I do not forget that we treated the Sultan of Zanzibar in the same way, and that as far as I can learn administration



## VIRTUES OF RHUBARB

by the people of Zanzibar is progressing pretty fast, and also in other countries, such as Kenya, where direct rule is used. I tried indirect rule in Arabia when I started. I did not think it worked there but direct rule certainly would not have worked either. I had heard good accounts of indirect rule in the Northern Territories and looked forward to studying it there.

I was fortunate before dinner to find myself being looked after by a very charming young lady in a simple, flouncy, frilly frock, who was a guest in the house. She was the daughter of the administrator of Tenkodogo and had spent all her twenty years in the colonies, in Indo-China and here in Africa. During dinner, when I sat between Mme. Poli and this fairy creature, her attentions were more occupied by the teasing of young military officers. Mme. Poli had been to school in England and told us she had enjoyed everything except the rhubarb. Whenever she had had the courage to refuse this, she had met with the pained remonstrance, "*Mais, Mademoiselle, c'est bon pour le cabinet!*"

We spent all next day in Wagadugu; the family spring-cleaned the car inside and out in such a fashion that it was barely recognizable, while Mme. Poli came and carried off Doreen and myself for a tour of the town, where there were fair-sized stores and a great native market. I was glad to notice that apparently the Gold Coast still gave some of its small quota of cloths to its neighbours, for we saw a number of women wearing bright-coloured garments obviously made in Lancashire. One woman had 'Winston' and 'Monty' all over her dress.

In the afternoon we went for a drive, seeing the barrages being built for the water supplies of the neighbourhood. This will impound a large acreage of water and one of them was already quite big enough to serve the needs not only of some domestic and agricultural purposes, but also for recreation, for you could easily have sailed small boats upon it. We were taken for a drive through what the Wagaduguites call the Bois de Boulogne, and indeed it was quite reminiscent of its namesake. The wide tree-lined avenue in which were the Residency and principal offices was known as the Champs Élysée. The layout of Wagadugu was on a large and generous scale, In fact, driving through the avenues in the residential quarter, I was

## WAGADUGU AT LAST

led to expect that they would surround an extensive city, but when I saw the business part of the town itself I had the impression that there was more layout than there was town.

Wagadugu of course has quite a history, but African mud, at any rate where rains occur, gives no chance to a town however ancient to preserve much in the way of monuments. But there is always an atmosphere of romance about a place which has been a centre of trade in old times and Wagadugu had been a great caravan centre with a route running through Fada n Gurma to the Hausa country. This route met the one from Salaga, in the Gonja country of the Northern Territories, at Jega. In these markets kola nuts, gold dust and slaves were exchanged for salt and European goods.

## Chapter XVI

### THE END OF THE DRIVE AT TAMALE

*Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof.*  
ECCLESIASTES.

BOTH Fada n Gurina and Wagadugu lie almost on the 12th parallel of latitude. It runs through the parklands which separate the savannah from the forest and marks a great change in culture. Hitherto the cattle had been great horned beasts and humped zebus. Now humpless cattle were beginning to be the rule. Below this latitude the camels ceased and we were already beginning to enter the tsetse fly belt. The palms also were altering. We should see no more of the date and allied palms of the north and were already beginning to see the oil palms of the south. The real Islam of the desert had long ceased and the Muslims of the bush had strongly animistic leanings. Now, however, Islam even as a veneer was nearly finished and we were in the country of simple nude animists.

We managed to lose our way when leaving the hospital on the 1st of April to find the southbound road. We wound round avenues and suburban streets with little in the way of houses before we got on to the road to Po. It was rather a pleasant road within the town limits, with well-built family compounds, shady and with plenty of room. We were vastly amused with a couple of pig marathons. One race was of medium-sized pigs and another of rather smaller, but they all galloped a zigzag course in fine style, racing round the compounds until they were out of sight.

Granaries here belong to compounds rather than to villages; they were family more than communal affairs. The provision of these granaries was an administrative measure started in the Niger Colony by Governor Toby as an insurance against famine. He told me that he had to wait for a really good harvest to begin the scheme so that a good reserve could be put by. After that it was easy, and

the new crop all goes into the granaries. It had taken a bit of doing to impose this measure on improvident Africans, but they now saw the benefit of it, and having twice seen famine stricken populations, in Arabia and in Germany, it was a measure that made a strong appeal to me. In the Côte d'Ivoire, so M. Poli told me, they had got beyond the village stage and now left it to each family to keep their own reserve.

All along this road the bridges had been uselessly destroyed in the days of Vichy. Work was in hand on some of them, others had already been repaired, but the frequent deviations gave me an excellent opportunity for studying these native constructions. The bridges were built on piles consisting of straight tree trunks with a forked top, on which were laid the cross pieces of other tree trunks supporting the road. We had passed over hundreds of them and they carried lorries and all the traffic necessary for administrative purposes. In these countries hardly any of the population have got to the stage of having private cars.

The speedometer registered 4,595 miles. It was again a Tuesday morning and just six weeks since that other Tuesday when we had turned out of Uphousden. The contrast between the two scenes 4,000 miles apart, not counting our water crossings, presented itself vividly. There was our old Tudor house standing snow-clad in a white landscape, fast bound in the iron grip of frost, the bare trees, the leaden sky, ourselves huddled in rugs and overcoats in the car as we started off. Here was the red dusty road, tree lined, a broken bridge, a goat, a small village and a cutting through the red rock, green trees on either side, blue sky above, and we sat in the car wearing as little as was reasonably possible, sticking to the seats with heat.

The country somehow took on a gentler aspect as we went down south. The greens seemed softer and it gave the impression of being more wooded than bush, though the trees by the roadside were often much hacked about, burnt and untidy.

We passed crowds moving south. They were carrying all their worldly goods with them, either on their heads or on donkeys, as if it were a refugee country. It reminded me of the processions of displaced persons and refugees in Germany. There were villages where the whole population seemed to be sitting down packed and ready

to move south. This perpetual movement goes on year by year from French territory into British. Some instinct seems to move them. They head in the Kumasi direction though many do not know what they are going to do when they get there.

Presently we came out into the open and climbed up a hill to the last French administrative station of Po, where we found the good Gautier and Robaglia. Here was the latter's home, a large white bungalow on a high plinth with a good view. In its cool and dim interior we fell to the enjoyment of the enlivening douches and drinks and a most refreshing lunch and sleep.

Robaglia had an extraordinarily good well at Po. He said it was so ancient that according to the people it went back beyond their history. It had been dug down into the granite to a great depth by some bygone race. There were a few others in the surrounding country like it, but the modern inhabitants did not dig such wells. It gave good clear water with a far better taste than any I remembered drinking recently, and I should think the level fell considerably as a result of our visit.

There was a certain sadness about our leave-taking near five o'clock. This was the final good-bye of our journey to French hosts. We had travelled all the way from Calais under French protection and had met with every imaginable kindness. We shall, I hope, see some of these new friends again, but there was something symbolic about this farewell. The Arab-speaking world we had so long lived in was for the time at least behind us, and we were about to move out of the territory of the other race to which I had so long been attached by ties of affection and respect.

We circled the buildings of the little station and headed down a hill with wooded meadows and a running stream beside us. Curiously enough the traffic now seemed to be going in the opposite direction, and we began to see ladies clad in no more than the dress of Mother Eve, though the fashion here was not fig but 'nim' leaves. They wear a bunch fore and aft. Rahima knew that in Arabia I had favoured the wearing of the clothes of the country, and we had pulled her leg until perhaps she partly believed that we should do the same here. But I think she was the most shocked: "Human beings like that. They are incredible creatures! Naked. Not a stitch on

except a few leaves that they borrow from the trees and tie on their waists. I suppose we must call it natural and economical."

The first of April. It was the date on which we had first arrived at Aden in 1934 at the start of ten happy years. Unkind friends had suggested it was a very suitable date! I wondered if it would prove so this time. Naturally my thoughts were turning to the new responsibilities I must so soon assume. With affections so deeply mortgaged elsewhere should I prove equal to it and give as much as I wished to? The journey had awakened feelings of sympathy and interest for the simple people amongst whom our immediate future was cast. I knew also that as a result of it I was arriving as less of a new boy than I should have done had I come by sea, and I could at least appreciate the country in its wider setting.

In twelve short miles a simple notice by the roadside read "Gold Coast" and there was Amory the District Commissioner, with Hughes the Assistant Conservator of Forests, from Navrongo to meet us. They were immaculately clad in their best store-suits and made us in our travel worn state feel extremely disreputable, though they could hardly have expected us to look otherwise. It was strange somehow to speak English to European administrators, but the greeting was as kind as that we had had everywhere else, and the meeting had something in it of a homecoming. Amory sent us on ahead with directions as to how to turn into Navrongo, and off we started again. Even without the label and the meeting it would have been easy to tell the change of influence; the bridges were tidy P.W.D. structures, the telephone lines were borne on the iron poles which the Crown Agents send to every British colony; the road was well kept and the pleasant little villages tidier and tamed. A little over seven miles brought us to Navrongo. There was no need for Amory's careful directions for at each little turning stood an immaculately clad African policeman making impeccable traffic signs.

Amory's kind hospitality was as wholesale as that of our French friends, and to our horror we found that he had turned out of his house to make room for our vast tribe, although I had telegraphed for the use of the resthouse. There was one very welcome British institution awaiting us, afternoon tea, and three full pots stood on the tea tables invitingly laid on the terrace.

The next day he took Doreen, Elizabeth and myself out for a drive, in the course of which we started to learn something of the trees which were new to us. There were shea nuts, *daudawa* and *akee* apples, and *nims* too, the trees from which the ladies culled their frocks for the day. The younger ones shunned even these encumbrances and moved lithely, graceful living statues in chocolate.

Our goal was the native administration school at Chana, a boarding school for boys and girls, where we went through each class, hearing a sample of what they were learning and then visited their quarters. Classes of African children sat at desks, naked to the waist and wearing no more than one abbreviated calico garment. With their frizzy peppercorn hair there was little to distinguish boys from girls save bust development, quite considerable in some cases, until they were called upon to answer questions when the gentler sex was apparent with the voice. The lesson, on methods of farming, impressed me very much as being one of the most useful of its kind I had heard.

In the afternoon Amory took us round the market where we were shown the white and red kola nuts. We all know Coca Cola well enough, and I thought of towns in the American Zone of Germany with signs to the Coca Cola and ice cream factories. There one got the impression that these were staple American foods. The story and romance of the kola trade almost equals that of Eastern spices and of incense, and may be as old. Kola means to the native of West Africa much what 'qat' means to the Yemeni and Abyssinian, though kola I imagine is much less harmful. It is said to give great powers of endurance. 'Qat' makes you feel a superman, but this is rather a mental state, transient and illusory. The kola nut mostly grows in Wenchi and Sunyani in Ashanti, but was generally believed to come from the kingdom of Gonja in the Northern Territories. Salaga, the commercial capital of Gonja, was the end of the caravan route from Jega and Kano and the merchants of Kano largely controlled the trade which was very ancient. The nuts are carried great distances but have to be picked over often as they ferment quickly and infect each other. The wastage is therefore great and the price high, though quicker modern means of transport have brought the price down, in Navrongo for example, to four a penny for the

red nuts and four for threepence for the white. Of old they reached the Mediterranean where they were sold for a dollar a piece, having been exchanged in Gonja against glass beads from Venice and Tripoli silk. We bit the nuts, but it is one of those acquired tastes and I found them too bitter to enjoy. The white tasted rather better than the red and is the more highly prized. The bitter taste is said to have the property of making the foulest water taste sweet. The nuts are certainly sustaining, and the Africans regard them as an aphrodisiac. They have also a symbolic value because the two kernels in a nut interlock. They were therefore always included with gifts as a mark of friendship and oaths of fidelity were sworn on them.

In the morning our good-bye to our kind host had a different quality to our previous farewells for one knew we should see him constantly again.

Amory was the first District Commissioner I met, and it took only a short time to recognize his devotion to his primitive charges. He summed them up by saying that there was something innately decent about them which made you respect them. A short acquaintance with the other District Commissioners and with members of technical departments was enough to convince me that the Northern Territories were fortunate in being served by Englishmen who had the same affection for the Africans of the country as Amory. Furthermore, I saw that there was a close harmony and unity of purpose between all of them, even if their views on how to achieve the purposes of our mission differed.

What was new to me was the great gulf between the British staff and the people. We foreigners lived in quarantine camps, physically and socially. It was nobody's fault. Obviously one way of protecting Europeans in the days when West Africa was the white man's grave was to segregate them. Socially the gulf was due to language and the great gap in culture. But I did not like it. Hitherto I had been able to feel that I was one with the people, that the Government, however many foreigners it had in it, was part of the country. Here it had the look and feel of a foreign occupation however much it showed, as it did, its benevolence to the people. The attitude of some of the older British staff to the development of the country aroused in me a deep sympathy, for it was the attitude I had felt in



Zanzibar so many years before. It was based on the preservation of all that was best in native customs and the slow absorption of new things.

But more recent experience had made me feel these things could no longer be. I was as desperately sincere in my feelings about the inevitability of rapid advance as they were in their anxiety to build slowly. What made me sorry was that mine was an impersonal conviction which I should have felt in any part of Africa as primitive as this, whereas they were dealing with a people with whom they had grown up and for whom they had a personal affection such as I had for the peoples with whom I had spent long years. Amongst many of this excellent team of officers, however, I found in time many who felt as I did.

We had one hundred and twenty-three miles to go to Tamale and were not expected to take more than four hours, but British laterite is no less subject to corrugation than French, and over the later part of the road we bumped our way in the same old painful fashion. We soon reached the populous centre of Bolgatanga, a rapidly developing trading centre which may soon be the biggest town in the Protectorate. The first part of the journey lay through open country with trees planted along the road in the well-ordered precision of a British regiment. There were views over rolling grass downs, whereon were smiling villages breathing all the charm of unspoilt Africa.

As we bowled along the park drives I felt I was visiting a well-kept Whipsnade, with everything in its natural surroundings but tidy. It had the air of a well-watered, well-kept gentleman's park. Presently however the bush became thicker and the road worse. At the river at Nasia there were some beautiful water scenes and we stopped on the drift to take photographs. Apart from the Niger I think these river crossings, of which we passed three to-day, were about the only picturesque water scenes we saw all the way after the Atlas mountains.

Twenty-two miles out of Tamale we were met by Imray, in charge of the police in the Protectorate, who said he had come out to show us the way. He himself saw the humour of this remark, for I suppose few people find their way to Tamale over such a distance, but it was a courtesy which we appreciated on this hot and dusty morning, and

#### THE END OF THE DRIVE AT TAMALE

I doubt if in fact we should have found our way through the streets of Tamale to our new home had he not been there to guide us.

A little later along the straight red road ahead of us we grew aware of what in the distance looked like an Anglo-African town scattered in the bush on the hillside, and so it was. Thus it was that we reached Tamale, the goal of the 4,000-mile journey. Savelugu Road, Watherston Road; how strange to see again English road names, or indeed any road names at all.

The speedometer registered 4,822 when we stopped in front of the Residency. Beyond the garden, a dried-up lawn studded with green daudawas, mangoes and heavily-laden frangi-panis, was a wide horizon of African bush without a sign of human habitation.

## Chapter XVII

### ON TO KUMASI

*This is one of the greatest kingdoms in Africa. There is no court more splendid than the court of the King of As-han-tee. All around him glitters with GOLD. He wears strings of gold beads round his neck, arms, knees, and ankles, and gold rings upon his fingers. His throne is a stool covered with gold. His guards, like himself, shine with gold.*

FAR OFF.

*I know the particular and private hell which is in store for me one day for the many misdemeanours I have committed. It will be to wander eternally through Sudan bush in search of the desert, where one may see what will bring happiness or oblivion at a distance and where one may at least face Destiny in the open.*

FRANCIS RODD (LORD RENNEL).

BETWEEN Uphousden and Tamale the car was our home, the travelling caravan of the circus. Nothing else was permanent. With it were associated memories of our camping places, the spots in which it had rested for a night or a midday halt. Everything else, the hotels, the resthouses, were fleeting. At Tamale the caravan's long, long trail had come to an end, and when it was unpacked it became only a touring station wagon. It no longer had any air of permanence. It would be rare for all the seven to travel together in it again. Probably never would it have just the same 'furnishings' which made it a home.

The house now took on this aspect, though there was nothing very homely about it or indeed much to commend it at all. It was a large warehouse-looking building with a tin roof. Roughly speaking it consisted of one barn down and one up, the latter being divided into a series of horse boxes with half-height doors. We shared it with a bat population estimated on reasonable data at about two thousand, and at least four swarms of bees. Three of these inhabited the ceiling of Elizabeth's partition and the fourth defended the entrance to a bathroom. It was not long before all of us had been stung. The bats

lived mostly above the main roof which covered the quarters of the rest of the family. They made a noise rather like an armoured regiment on the move. Another ill-disciplined battalion or so in my office quarrelled in high pitched voices all morning. At night, before shutting up, the boys laid cloths and papers on the floors and furniture below as a convenience for them; it saved their having to interrupt their frolics to go into the garden. This was not possible upstairs, and when they had finished with the bath in the morning I washed it out for myself. One understood thoroughly the literal interpretation of having 'bats in the belfry' and 'bees in the bonnet'.

I slept outside. The house had a porch, above which was an open verandah on which my camp bed was set up. Often just before dawn I was awakened by the swish of the wings of countless bats returning squadron by squadron from all night manœuvres. They came down like dive bombers over my bed making for the eaves. I suppose it was the recruits who stayed in the house all night and anyway there would not have been room for them all to do any more than sleep. It was an extraordinary sight to see those formations setting out at dusk. One could hear them falling in for parade under a corner of the tin roof which they scratched and scrambled over. There was bumping and squealing and all manner of noise. Then there was silence and a moment later thirty or forty or more bats would emerge together in one swoop. The performance would be repeated over and over again till hundreds of bats had set forth. Practice flights then took place in the house and went on all night. If you had a ceiling fan going there were sure to be several casualties. One evening Doreen found Leila comforting two baby bats in her bed. She said their mothers had left them.

My verandah faced almost due east and day after day I watched the sun rise across the tedious-waste of bush. Night seemed to rise wearily from such an unrefreshing couch and dawn seemed haggard until turned to crimson by the rim of sun lifting above the horizon. Three and a quarter hours before, this sun had greeted my friends in the Hadhramaut. Across the peaks of the Yaf'a'i mountains it had struck the cream-coloured minarets of Ta'iz, and coloured the Red Sea. Thence across the twin Niles it had swept Kordofan and Darfur, and passed the Emirates of Nigeria before it discovered the bush before me.

## THE KING OF ALL THE WORLD

At the time of the rains and the freshening dew there were mornings it sparkled on the cobwebs and gave a delusive radiance to the coverlet of white mist hiding the stunted wastes beneath.

Strange it is that its last call before it reaches us is on an old gentleman sixty miles or so east who is known as King of all the World. It is strange because while he himself claims descent from Nimrod the Red Hunter, the conquering dynasty he heads rules a people who look to forgotten 'Ad, the tribe of giants from the 'wind carved sand hills' of the Hadhramaut, as their progenitors. Hither they claim came the scattered remnants of the impious race whom God dispersed with a cold blast of a raging wind, bringing with them bracelets through which a modern man may pass, and the art of digging underground cisterns in the rock, which I have now seen both here and in the Hadhramaut. So, when I visited him soon after my arrival, the King told me, from the depths of the dentist's chair which is his less formal throne, and if the legend be truth then would it seem that the doom of Sura XI v. 60 has been fulfilled.

"And a curse was made to follow them in the world and on the day of resurrection. Lo! 'Ad disbelieved in their Lord. A far removal for 'Ad, the folk of Hud."

It is a picturesque kingdom he rules, with a military hierarchy which reminded me of that of Ethiopia. The King wears a shabby blue gown, is crowned with a magic hat much loaded with charms and has a court of curious officials, being hedged around with singular tabus. He may not address his council and has a mouthpiece to convey his greetings to them. He has a master of the kitchen and a taster of his food lest he be poisoned. This official is also charged with the task of informing the King of anything that happens in the night and if one of the Queens, of whom there are a very large number, has a baby. He has one official who may only see him on Fridays, for which he gets a kola nut, unless anyone dies when he must inform his royal master of the fact, though he may only do so on Wednesday and Thursday nights. The rest of this official's time is taken up in keeping the spirits of the dead kings company in a village some distance away.

This monarch is chosen from various candidates who have passed

through the appropriate gates of chieftdom, by the spirits of bygone Kings of all the World. He may not be deposed or abdicate, and when a chief some time ago suggested that a mad predecessor of the King should be confined in silver fetters it cost the rash fellow his life. The King, by the nature of the constitution, must be an old, old man before he succeeds.

There are several other constitutions in the country as curious and as complicated. They are preserved largely by the system of indirect rule, and I soon began to wonder how the country was to progress if they were maintained without at least very considerable modification.

Life soon settled into a routine. We each began to build up our jobs for the day: Zahra and Leila resumed their interrupted lessons with Margaret, and I had again an office to attend, varied now and then by short trips.

But for me the story of the journey was not ended. In my look at the map I had pictured seeing not only the change from desert to bush, but from bush to forest, and I had expected to complete my cross-section of West Africa within a few days of my arrival. But it was not until we had been three weeks in Tamale that I received a summons to come to Kumasi and thus to extend my cross-section of West Africa.

I suppose all of us have stored away in our memories pictures of strange countries derived from childhood reading, which have little relation to what we may learn of those countries in later years. I had first read of Kumasi, I don't know how many years ago, in *With Wolseley to Coomassie*. There is little I remember of this picture save the triumph of British arms over King Koffee of Ashanti. I have an idea he was painted as rather a monster and for that reason the story, with other reminiscences of King Prempeh, and his blood baths, connected in my memory with 1897, the year of my birth, and subsequent stories of the Golden Stool, were relegated to a sort of mental store-house of romantic barbarities, like cannibal feasts of missionary stew, long since past. All of these Ashanti reminiscences had little connection with the blue book kind of information I had gathered about the Gold Coast in later years, though the presence of a Prempeh as one of the Church of England clergy in Mauritius

## THE ENDLESS BUSH

during my time there made them a little more real. To-day, however, I was actually to reach King Prempeh's capital, though I did not for an instance suppose that it would look in the least like my picture of it, namely, mud forts in hot and steamy forest clearings, British troops in red coats, haggard faces of besieged garrisons and a stench of dead Ashanti warriors.

As I started down the main road again I met many women clad in vari-coloured cloths carrying water-pots or tins on their heads. Years ago in Zanzibar I used to be sad to see the beautifully-shaped water-pots being replaced by empty kerosene tins, but I am glad to see that the intervening twenty years or more has not yet seen the complete disappearance of the traditional vessels. Such is the shortage of water in the Northern Territories that there are many women who have to walk ten miles into Tamale to get their water. The problem of water supplies is one of the most serious with which Government has to deal.

For the best part of seventy miles there was little new to be seen. Just the same endless bush, sometimes thicker, sometimes broken, scarred or burnt, though I was interested to see small plantations of young teak trees standing straight and slim with huge oval leaves. My new driver, Adamu, an ex-soldier who speaks a certain amount of pidgin English, told me that they were called *tikpo*, which is merely a corruption of teak pole.

We passed small villages, though some of them were barely awake. Sometimes there would be a tiny market, and at one mangoes were already laid out for sale. There were little platforms built on which I suppose the elders would sit and gossip as they did in Zanzibar villages. Sometimes there were little granaries, much smaller and more cone-like than those of the French territories. By the roadside there were often huge ant hills ten feet high or more, buttressed and fluted like fairy castles, but on the whole I felt cramped and confined with all this endless bush, whose first interest had passed, and which allowed no open view at all. Although there was some fresh green about it, due to the recent rain, it seemed so much more monotonous than the open desert.

Monotony is boredom and to me boredom is hell. I am not at all sure that this pestilential bush is not the devil's favourite and most

particular abode. If the attention paid by the dwellers in the bush to the appeasement of the devil indicates that they have discovered this as a fact, the implicit acknowledgement that he is evil in their methods of dealing with him shows that the spirit within them is divine and not diabolic. It is interesting to know, too, that in the forest, which if it is not so deadly monotonous as the bush is more soul cramping, even more sinister, the devil himself appears more evil and his appeasement requires rites more horrible than those of the bush country. In Africa, ritual murder and the horrors of the fetish seem to belong more to the forest than the bush. The bush is at best an ugly hag, and even if she is often in merry mood, she is sometimes half-wittedly wicked, and always secretive, stupid: the forest is a matured diabolic beauty, dignified in appearance but capable of unfathomable murder and loving the warm and sensuous heat of dim, sweaty fogs. Compared to these the desert is clean and young, pink and virginal, high-minded, uncompromising only in defence of her chastity.

In seventy-two miles I came to the large town of Salaga, the principal city of Gonja, a crowded metropolis of round house compounds, with some character and a feeling of history about it. The Kingdom of Salaga was, until Wolsley's defeat of King Koffee Kalkalli, a dependency of Ashanti, but it then broke away and asserted its independence. It was the Ashantis who controlled its market. They well realized the advantages of their geographical position as middlemen for all trade between the countries to their north and the coast, and at Salaga the Muslim traders of the interior sold their cattle and sheep. I met there the wealthy chief butcher, a Hausa merchant, who still carries on a large trade in livestock.

What a romance there is in this ancient trade, and how real does it become when you yourself have travelled down the ancient routes. Our trip across the Sahara enabled me to conjure up visions of the ceaselessly plodding caravans of camels bearing the cottons of Manchester, the manufactures of Nuremberg and other German cities, the beads of Venice, over thousands of miles. The mind pictured merchants of many races at many different market towns breaking the bulk, bargaining and re-packing, and I wondered whether the original manufacturers, the people who had woven the cotton and



silk or forged the swords, ever pictured those who ultimately used them. To-day of course, or at least in pre-war days, you meet the travellers of Manchester and foreign countries coming out to see just what appeals to the native taste. Travelling over the Sahara, like travelling up the ancient incense road, or living in scenes of ancient trade such as Zanzibar or Mocha, gives one a sense of kinship with Marco Polo or Ibn Battuta and makes vivid biblical and other ancient accounts of trade.

While I was in Salaga I went to the little village of Pembi, three miles to the east, and met the chief and his court. It was at Pembi, on the 1st of September 1894, that Isafa, the King of Salaga and Pembi and twelve of his chiefs made a treaty of friendship and freedom of trade with Queen Victoria, which was negotiated on behalf of the British by George Ekem Ferguson.

Ferguson was a man about whom all too little is known. There is scant record, if any, of the exploration of the Northern Territories in the accounts of the better known explorers, and a great part of this exploration was carried out by him. He negotiated a great many treaties with the tribes in the country. Perhaps the reason why little is known about him is that he was a native of the Gold Coast, but apart from being a diplomat of parts he was highly educated, a trained surveyor and an astronomer, and I like to remember that the Royal Geographical Society honoured him with the award of the Gill Memorial Prize in 1894.

Curiously enough the treaties he made with the country of Salaga, and other kingdoms of the Northern Territories, are very much like those which were made with the chiefs of the Aden Protectorate at even earlier dates. The rulers of Salaga declared that they had not entered into treaty with any other foreign power and that they would not negotiate treaties with, nor cede their territory to, nor accept a protectorate from or enter into any agreement, arrangement or treaty with, any other foreign power. It was mutually promised that there should be friendship and freedom of trade between the King and his people and the subjects of the Queen, and that British subjects could have free access to all parts of Salaga and the rights to possess houses and build property according to the laws of Salaga, whose authorities should decide differences or disputes between British

merchants and the people of the country according to the customs and laws of the country.

What a very long way that simple treaty has led. The rulers of the Aden Protectorate have managed to preserve their internal autonomy to this day, and I suppose there is no one now who would wish by peaceful penetration and the exercise of suzerainty to deprive them of it. How differently to our forefathers do we look on such things! I remember as a boy how the triumph of British arms over simple savages used to strike me as being within the natural order of things. Our forefathers acted in good faith, and we cannot blame them for making mistakes which we with our greater knowledge should avoid to-day, but for all the mistakes they made we are in full measure atoning by leading the people whom we have conquered, or with whom we made simple trading treaties, to an independence more real than any they enjoyed in the past.

He was a nice, friendly but almost blind old man, the King of Salaga, now more modestly called the Kpembewura, whom I met to-day, and he was delighted to take a ride with me in my car, leaving his horse to one of his courtiers, as we went to visit the school. When we had finished this he took me back to his own compound, leading me through a large, round entrance hall hung with the skins of nine lions, one of which he told me had been a man-eater. The only piece of furniture in the room was an iron bedstead, covered with another lion skin. The Kpembewura told me that he had thirteen wives, nineteen children and forty-one grandchildren, and when he took me into the central court of the compound, where dinner of soup and stew was already preparing, his senior queen, an old lady with frizzly white hair, much to my embarrassment, fell on her knees, beating the ground with her hands, and grinning up welcomes to me with up-turned wizened face and incomprehensible greetings.

In subsequent visits to chiefs in other parts of the country I met other nice, friendly, and in some cases almost blind, old men, each with his court and following of elders. All of them were in greater or less degree duly constituted native authorities, and two were paramount chiefs 'ruling' over very considerable areas and populations. Both of these latter were about ninety, and one was a real *Alice in Wonderland* character. All had teams of elders. These authorities

## THE RIVER VOLTA

had staffs of permanent officials. None of them were educated above Standard VII and few I saw could have held down a clerical job under Government. The chiefs and elders were for the most part men not only old but without any great sign of intelligence. I only met one who seemed to be fairly bright, though I saw a bunch of chiefs in another place who certainly had personality. Yet the schools and some of the other services 'run' by these native authorities were of a high standard. I found it extremely difficult to believe that this manifestation of indirect rule had any great degree of reality behind it, for it was plain that neither the native authorities nor their permanent staff had either the initiative, or the intelligence and training, to enable them to start them, understand them or maintain them. The chiefs owe their powers mainly I believe to their magical or priest-killing attributes and were, I am told, resuscitated not so many years ago. Indeed I saw one area where patient research was being carried out to see who the chiefs ought to be if the institution had not fallen into desuetude. It would in some cases be difficult for any but an old, old man to succeed owing to the constitution of the kingdoms.

From Salaga I drove on twenty-five miles to the banks of the Volta, seeing quite close to it a small herd of enormous baboons in a cassava garden. On the banks of the river I got out to wait for the ferry to come from the other side, watching a long-legged electric-blue beetle crossing the road.

What a beautiful sight this open river was after the stifling bush! It was much more than the width of the Severn at home at Shrewsbury, but ran like it between green sloping banks. I wondered why it was that some of this great quantity of water could not be dammed up or pumped up and used to irrigate and provide water to so much of this Protectorate which is reported so dry. It was pleasant sitting there and feeling one's spirit expand with the open view. It made me think that while the faiths born in the desert cannot flourish in the bush they can on the face of the waters, and I remember the gentleness and deep religious feeling of many a sailor, Christian and Muslim. Our quiet crossing of the river took about seven minutes. It was washing day on the other side, indeed I suppose it is every day, and cheerful women scrubbed clothes, gossiped and laughed and had laid

out brightly-coloured clothes to dry on the green grass till it looked like a brilliant herbaceous border.

Yeji, on the further bank of the Volta, was a pleasant town in which most of the houses were rectangular, for I was now approaching the forest and rectangular houses are one of the principal marks of the forest culture. There were quite a number of shops and too much corrugated iron, that extremely ugly but, alas, extremely useful roofing medium common to most of the towns in tropical Africa.

From now onwards the bush got greener and thicker and here and there tall forest trees appeared. Occasionally in the depths on either side of the road I saw red flowers aglow in the green. There was a constant succession of villages in the clearings, and most of them had mangoes and bananas growing in them. I stopped to have lunch in a forest clearing a hundred yards or so from the roadside, sitting on an ant hill listening to the gurgling of a bird on a tree-top, while butterflies lazily floated about me. The trees were entwined with creepers and trailing vines hung from them.

Apart from Adamu I had also Dana my new personal servant with me. Both were ex-soldiers, Adamu a Sissala from the north-west and Dana a Dagomba and a subject of the King of all the World. They got on well together but were quite different in temperament. Adamu was quiet, very well mannered and a considerable if slow thinker. He had a charming old mother with the manners of an old-fashioned grande dame. He had been to Gibraltar, Ethiopia and Burma. A little earlier we had visited a very nice young chief not far from Tamale. As we drove back I said to him: "What's your chief like, Adamu?" He pulled down his lower eyelid and said: "I go India, I go Burma, I see the world. Chief no good." Dana, a cheerful heretic had got detribalized in the army and also somewhat demoralized. He was apt to go on the razzle at intervals and drink too much pito, the local beer, but he was a good baker. To-day he was delighted with the whistling kettle. "Him sing," he said gleefully, "him sing good," as he brought me my tea on my ant hill, where I simply dripped with perspiration.

In another seven miles we had really and truly reached the tropical rain forest, and I stopped on the top of the Mampong escarpment. One rarely has a view over the tops of tropical forests and jungles.

## IN FOREST DEPTHS

Certainly in Malaya I never remember a sight quite like this; for the most part one moves about beneath its surface oozing from every pore and scarcely seeing the sun above, but here below me stretched out to the far distance line after line and ridge after distant ridge of crowded forest. Adamu standing beside me pointed at it and said: "Plenty elephant, plenty lion, plenty snake, plenty scorpion." Even the air above the rounded tops of the trees looked green. I felt I was looking through the glass window of some diving bell beneath the sea and seeing an ocean floor covered with gigantic green brain corals. The greeny, steamy, heat haze above it moved like currents under the sea. One almost expected to see great seaweeds waving above it, and great fish threading their way amongst them.

We got back into the car and descended into these submarine depths and a sort of laundry-fog. The depths of the forest look dark and mysterious but not cool and still. One felt they were throbbing with life. Here and there the sunlight filtered in. You saw the trees uncrowded, showing their gracious forms, trunks straight and slender like those of the African girls. Trees unwarped by the wind, very green. They extended shapely rounded arms with graceful stretched out fingers. You felt you could paint portraits of them or conversation pieces.

Now we came to forest villages looking just like the little African villages I had known so well in the depths of Zanzibar and Pemba, for there too the Africans belong to the forest culture. The fruits and vegetables were all the same; cassava and bananas, mangoes and avocado pears, maize, orange trees and pineapples. Women were clad again, wearing brightly-coloured cloths twisted under their arms. This marked change to the forest culture was one of the most distinctive of the whole journey. At Agades we had seen practically the last of Arab buildings with flat roofs; at Tanout we had seen about the first of the round houses of the parkland culture, and here was the forest culture, rectangular houses with pent roofs.

For the last nineteen miles the road was tarmacadamed, a blue stretch, instead of the red, running through the green. The last long stretch of tarmacadam had been in Northern Algeria, and here too as there, I saw again green well-kept verges through the villages.

## ON TO KUMASI

Every now and then there were patches of poinsettia in the hedges, glowing with the scarlet of grenadiers. Life was very busy in the villages, with people going back and forth on their various occasions. I noticed boys carrying trays of black pots on their heads, and just outside Kumasi I passed the Wesley Memorial College.

Two hundred and thirty-seven miles from Tamale, Kumasi is a town of wide streets and well-built shops, policemen on traffic duty, kerbs and pavements. No, it all looked very different from what it must have looked fifty years ago, and I cannot say that I felt it looked particularly African.

\*            \*            \*

Or great ugly things  
All legs and wings,  
With nasty long tails,  
Armed with nasty long stings.

R. H. BARHAM.

I came back from Kumasi the next day. It was night as we neared Tamale and I saw in the distance the lights of the villages we approached. Sometimes I would see a light and expect to pass a village or a house and arrive to find nothing but bush. I wondered if they could be the eyes of animals reflecting the car's headlights, but if they were animals I should have distinguished their twin eyes glowing red or green. After a little time I asked Adamu what one of these lights was. "Him witch," solemnly replied motor-minded Adamu.

Back home I found the stoep in process of invasion by insects. It had rained heavily the night before and everywhere was the grateful smell of wet earth. The day after rain, at the end of the dry season, insects, always common round lamps at night, come out in their myriads, and round the standard lamps flew swarms of small ants which came forth on a brief wedding night equipped with gossamer wings which, after one mad hour, they shed and crawl away.

In a short time winged termites joined them. Elizabeth, new to such phenomena, was almost convinced the small ants had suddenly grown bigger in *Alice in Wonderland* style. The termites increased in numbers till the thrashing of their wings round the lamps was one of the major sounds of the night. After a few minutes whirling flight

they dropped to the ground and then raced round the lamp stands in an anti-clockwise direction. It made me think of the pilgrimage and thousands of pilgrims on the *tawaf* round the Kaabah. Two toads hopped out from the shadows into the arena, and gorged themselves on the circumnabulating pilgrims till their backs were arched and they held their sides with pains of indigestion. We were driven from the stoep and retired upstairs to watch this hectic scene. There must have been at a time twenty thousand or more winged termites running round the lamps, and there was a constant stream of those who had shed their wings hurrying off in one direction to a crack at the base of the wall of the house.

The prodigality with which nature produces and wastes life in Africa is perhaps as great as, or greater than, that she shows in the sea. From this prodigality and waste, due perhaps to the heat, not even man is an exception. If insects are superabundant so are the parasites which infect them, and if man was not fertile, and endowed with the instinct for fertility, he would long have ceased to exist. Infantile mortality is enormous in Africa, due largely to the parasites borne by the insects, and African man seems as insensitive to this loss as the lower form of life. Or at least, if he is not insensitive he is philosophic about it. We, coming from a less prodigal climate, place a higher value on life, and have done much to reduce the human mortality and increase that of the insects and their parasites. Whether we can universally over Africa reduce infantile mortality to our own level is another question, but we shall and must certainly go on trying.

But it brings up another problem even greater. How are we going to feed adequately all those whose lives we save? The soil of Africa is fairly uniformly poor, and the African like the Arab was always under-nourished. Two-thirds of the world is under-nourished. Can the world produce enough to feed us all adequately? I remember the Arab mother with whom Doreen was discussing the saving of children. "If you save the children, whom Allah has willed should die, who will feed them? Where is the milk which you say children need? There isn't enough for the children there are." Whatever the final answer to these questions is, it is obvious that traditional methods of production can never be enough. If your population

## ON TO KUMASI

is in any case traditionally ill-nourished, if you save children on a large and untraditional scale, and destroy insects and their parasites on an even bigger and less traditional scale, you must surely use every device of modern science and method to produce food on an unprecedented and utterly untraditional scale.



## Chapter XVIII

### TO ACCRA AND THE GULF OF GUINEA

*Still stands the forest primeval;* LONGFELLOW.

*Relic of ages! could a mind, imbued  
With truths from heaven, created thing adore,  
I might with reverence kneel, and worship thee.  
It seems idolatry, with some excuse,  
When our forfather Druids in their oaks  
Imagined sanctity. The conscience, yet  
Unpurified by an authentic act  
Of amnesty, the meed of blood divine,  
Loved not the light, but, gloomy, into gloom  
Of thickest shades, like Adam after taste  
Of fruit proscribed, as to a refuge, fled.*

COWPER.

*The power of incorporating alien races, without trying to disintegrate them or to rob them of their individuality, is characteristic of the British Imperial system. It is not by what it takes away, but by what it gives, not by depriving them of their own character, language, and traditions, but by ensuring them the retention of all these, and at the same time opening new vistas of culture and advancement, that it seeks to win them to itself. . . .*

LORD MILNER.

Few people go to Accra for the first time through the back door, but we grew familiar with its distant hinterland before we saw the capital of the Gold Coast. I remember as a child a magic lantern slide of an old man snoring with his mouth wide open. You turned a handle and a stream of mice ran in. If you turned the handle backwards they came out tail first. It was as though we might find ourselves racing backwards up the gangway into a ship.

Doreen and I had been in the country just over three months before we started south on the last lap of our cross-section of West Africa. We stopped the night at Prang, a city state almost on the Ashanti frontier, where I visited the Native Authority which in this

place, surprisingly enough, is mostly Muslim, for Hausas from Nigeria outnumber the indigenous inhabitants by fifty to three. The president of the Native Authority is known as the Sarikin Zongo, or chief of the strangers. I was greeted with shots of welcome when I arrived, just as in Arabia, and it was a great change to find a council dressed in white robes and turbans unadorned by all the charms and curiosities which most of the chiefs in the Northern Territories wear. It is only amongst the Hausas that you get a real Muslim feeling in this country, and I found it most refreshing. Amongst the natives of the Northern Territories where Islam is found, it is merely nominal and added insurance to pagan beliefs. Muslims seem much more ready to talk than the primitives of the bush.

By now I had learnt something of the religion of bush and forest and discovered that, as elsewhere, it was explainable in terms of the environment in which the people lived. The people in the bush divide the trees into different categories. Some of them are friendly trees under which they sit, but all the trees in the bush are bad trees, and they protect themselves against them by special tree medicine. The sky, the earth, the bush form their environment. They worship the Sky God and the Earth Goddess. Life is a predestined thing, arranged by contract between you and the Sky God before you are born, though by suitable intercessions and offerings you may be able to amend your fate afterwards. The spirits of your ancestors are always there and, provided you treat them as you did in life, giving them homes to live in, and the appropriate offerings of food and drink, they will protect you and intercede for you with the Sky God. So it is difficult for you to leave the country of your birth where the spirits of your ancestors rest.

Your relations with the Goddess of the Earth are in charge of her Priest. Mother Earth hates violence. She cares for her children equally, and will provide for all so long as they keep up proper relations with her through her trustee, the Priest. You must make the appropriate offerings before you occupy or cultivate the land. You must give her harvest offerings, and you must make peace offerings if she is offended by the shedding of blood or crimes such as adultery.

Down here south of the Volta in the forest culture, religion tends to become more sinister. Here one feels the rule of the fetish, as the

tribal deities are loosely called. Here is a land where human sacrifice is still required and still exists, in so far as it can evade British law. Some of the fetishes do not like the shedding of blood, and in the past their human sacrifices were in some cases buried alive. Others rejoice in blood, and when one of the great ones dies attendants must be sent to look after him in the shadow world.

Constitutions, too, change south of the Volta. Over most of the north the chiefs cannot be deposed. Abdication, even the mention of it, is taboo. Their thrones are Skins. Here their thrones are Stools, and their people can depose them. There is a great variety of constitutions along this road from Navrongo in the north to Accra in the south. Some of them are real curiosities, and I often wonder how far they can survive with democracy, or whether indeed democracy can develop at all with them.

When my meeting with the rulers of Prang was over I drove back to the grassy glade where two small round houses formed our home for the night. The soft afternoon sun lit it up with a bright golden light, of which there was yet an hour or so to enjoy, and it was very peaceful and restful writing there at a table in the open. Night fell, and with it came mosquitoes and the usual plague of insects.

We supped early, and as we had our simple meal an occasional firefly trailed its twinkling light between us and the dark background of the bush. Wondering if he had any superstition about fireflies I asked Dana what it was.

"Him bottom fire. Him insect," he replied prosaically.

We breakfasted next morning near Ejura in the shade of real forest giants. There is a coolness about the forest at this time, and the leaves are generally wet with rain. The heat of the sun has not yet started to evaporate them and create the steamy heat which rises as the day wears on. There is certainly a great beauty in these forest depths which is quite absent from the bush. It is a place where contemplation is possible, but I should never like to live in it.

As we neared the Ashanti capital other contrasts with the Northern Territories became evident. Villages were frequent and life consequently more abundant. The people were more clothed and looked more sophisticated. Everywhere there were mission schools. Kumasi itself looked at first sight bigger than it really is. It is set in a bowl

## TO ACCRA AND THE GULF OF GUINEA

between green hills, which, grass-grown and cleared of forest, give it a rural, rather park-like atmosphere and form a pleasant contrast to the white buildings. Some of these are quite good, of a tropical European style, and there is a small but pleasant-looking shopping centre. White posts and chains round traffic centres, a clock tower on a little hill lend quite a festive air.

Finding our way to the south-east to get on to the Accra road we passed a large, lively, colourful market and the railway station. The railway does not run beyond Kumasi, and it was the first railway we had met since leaving Djelba. The frequent villages had nothing much to commend them. In fact there was so much corrugated iron that I began to think Tinslanti would be a better name for the country.

We passed lorries carrying great logs of mahogany, and at Ejisu station saw many of them loaded on trucks or lying by the sidings. Timber is one of the great industries of Ashanti and one of the most important exports of the Gold Coast. All through this country the Gold Coast's greatest crop, cocoa, was much in evidence by the side of the road, and it was easy to see how suitable a crop it was for African production, for it can easily be grown by peasant cultivation. These days the great wealth of the Gold Coast from its cocoa, most of which goes to America, is in much danger from the swollen shoot disease.

Up in the north you see almost naked musicians carrying their drums along the road; here, straggling along in twos and threes, were members of some local band, clad in a motley variety of European clothes, and bearing trombones, cornets, side-drums and the like. With an eye by now accustomed to the almost unbelievable simplicity of the north, the evident effect of greater prosperity and such influences as the railway on the people impressed me considerably. I fell to wondering whether the more doubtful products of 'progress' could be avoided. No one could claim that what they have acquired could all count as civilization. The trouble is that western education on a large scale in any eastern or African country brings in its trail a whole lot of undesirable by-products; an unreasoning admiration and desire for anything that comes out of the west, whether it is significant or not, a lack of knowledge of how to use western things properly, and far too much babuism and bad manners. Not that the African suffers

from the latter nearly so much as some people imagine, but the waste products of the road to progress are undeniably ugly and unpleasant.

Neither Nature nor man seems able to produce much without a waste and a mess of some sort, and I think we deceive ourselves if we think we can avoid waste in producing what we believe to be civilization. We can learn from past failures, but if we try too much to avoid mistakes we are likely to produce very little at all. Personally I believe that there need not be such a mess in Africa as there has been in the East: we ought to know more clearly now what our part is. But I have learnt that out of the mess in the East a generation of young men and women with great ideals is growing up. There is no need to bemoan that Africa is becoming Europeanized. It is in a sense, it has to be, but what is emerging will be no less African than we, owing something to our own wood-painted forefathers, are British.

Near all the large villages we passed companies of women walking in single file, in the habit learnt in centuries of moving along forest tracks, carrying on their heads great baskets of long green plantains, cocoa yams and other kinds of produce to the markets. Scarlet poinsettias, palms and ferns gave a hot-house appearance to the borders of the road, and behind them great silk cotton trees, some of them perhaps a hundred feet high, strongly buttressed at their roots, tall and straight with grey, bare trunks, looked rather like massive organ pipes. Their graceful branches reached out across the road so that one could see lofty, triumphal arches ahead, and travelled in a grateful shade. Foliaged creepers and ropes of vine screened the depths within from passing eyes.

After Konongo, where we bought white bread at 4d. a small roll, we began to hunt for somewhere to have lunch. It was no longer a question of finding shade, merely one of trying to find a path through which we could penetrate into the forest. Any other way of getting into it would have required machets. We found at last a little path which no doubt led to a village, and walked a hundred yards or so down it before we could find sufficient room at the side of the path to sit down.

While the whistling kettle was boiling, I found great snails three or four inches long, which form quite an important article of diet for these forest people. There is a regular time for the snail harvest,

and they are collected and smoked and threaded on strings. We sat amid a riot of ferns and undergrowth with the great trees towering above us. Whatever might be happening above, down below not a leaf stirred and the dense vegetation drowned every sound from the road. In truth the forest was neither still nor quiet. Yet the quality of the movement, the noiseless, effortless floating of butterflies and the quality of the sound, the chirp of the grasshoppers and the echo of a bird's call, only insisted how absolute the silence and stillness were.

In peaceful contemplation I was yet aware of the more sinister undercurrent of the forest atmosphere, and I think that in any considerable period of time spent in it, that side of things must make itself more evident. That night in Accra I found in our bedroom a book belonging to our host called *Jungle Diary* by a young man called Guthrie, who was injured in a drop to the jungles of the Karen hills, and was kept hidden there with his two companions by the kindly Karens while he recovered.

Certain entries showed the way that environment effects our thinking. He had only been there a day or two when he wrote: "Yet for all the singing, humming, whistling, whirring, chirping, grunting, for all the ceaseless noises of the jungle the quiet here is utter, the peace is complete. If the politicians and leaders could serve an apprenticeship in a silence like this, the silence of the Karen hills, they would approach their tasks with a different sense of values. If Hitler had spent his youth here the cemeteries of Warsaw and Rotterdam might be less crowded; there might be less destruction in Hamburg, Cologne and Berlin. Action without contemplation is surely dangerous. . . . We have lost the value of contemplation. . . . They (the Karens) *know* what this war means, but they can never understand what it means."

Surely in a very short time this young man was already beginning to learn the lesson which Buddha learnt in his period of contemplation under the bo-tree. Listen to him again, fifteen days later. "To-day the sun is strong and constant again. There are a few little fleecy white clouds, but even when they do shift in front of the sun they make little difference. Water, the sun and the earth. I wonder if we would be in such utter confusion now if we had gone on worshipping these three. It is a trinity about which there can be no

quibbling. After two thousand years of arguing about Christianity, what it means, warring and persecuting, how much better are we? And how much less better would we have been without it? The innate goodness in man will evolve as naturally as any other quality evolves. If Christianity has not fostered and quickened that evolution more than any other religion has done then Christianity has failed. . . . Living in the open air, ever hidden in the undergrowth, has opened our eyes to many foolishnesses in our other life. . . . Culture can better come from inside oneself than picked here and there from other men's thoughts."

Back on the road again we were stopped a few miles further on at a police barrier. A nice policeman came out and asked for our names and the number of the car. I asked him what the purpose of the barrier was, but he said he did not know. The barriers, he told us, had been instituted in the war, and he thought probably that Government had forgotten to remove them.

We crossed the Colony boundary, a hundred and seventeen miles from Accra. We passed Kibi, notorious for the Kibi murders, and Achimota, well-known for its famous College; and for the last forty or fifty miles before reaching Accra the forest ceased, though not the forest culture, for it is only since European occupation that the forest has disappeared.

On a visit of three days, with one's contacts confined to Europeans, there is very little one can find to say in favour of Accra, though I feel sure if one could have met the people in their homes and visited their clubs, the contacts made could not fail to have been interesting, for Accra is the administrative and commercial capital of a country of five million people who have made great progress in recent years towards a controlling voice in their own destiny. Things being as they were, however, we were in little better position than tourists from a ship, and from this point of view Accra has very little to commend it.

I suppose it is very difficult to build a new and beautiful city in a country such as tropical Africa where the native tradition of architecture is so primitive, and colonial territories have barely reached the stage when they have enough money to go in for more than purely utilitarian building. On the whole, imperial powers have not

thought it well to spend their metropolitan revenues on beautifying the towns of their overseas colonies. It is all very well comparing Accra with eastern towns which have a history and traditional architecture of their own. A few hours ashore in Zanzibar or Tangiers, where foreign activities are not too evident, and where there is an air of old history and romance, can be a delight. Cities like Colombo, Bombay and Singapore are full of a throbbing interest where old mixes with new, and old colonial towns like Cape Town and Durban have a character and beauty which linger long in the memory, and there are plenty of ugly towns, such as Port Said and Aden, where the interest of mankind seen in their streets outweighs the poverty of their buildings. For a fair comparison with Accra one should perhaps look at a town like Dar-es-Salaam laid out by the Germans, and there nature has been kind in providing a setting much more beautiful than that of Accra.

I doubt very much if it was in the past in the character of the British to be good town planners, and the beauty and attraction of London, and many an English town, depends largely on the fact that it has grown naturally. A comparison of London, Paris, the Hague and Berlin tells a great deal of the national characteristics of the people who built them, and those characteristics they have carried with them into their colonies, with better results in the case of the three latter people than of the British, for they have all planned. Yet the British of late years have taken to town planning, and towns such as Accra, where there is no tradition, certainly need it more than others which have a tradition of their own. Nothing is more difficult than for one race to plan satisfactorily for another.

The site of Accra has in itself not given much chance for beautiful town growing. It is built on a flat, infertile plain with little in the way of scenic background. There are low hills in the distance, but it is all hopelessly unbeautiful, and the general impression is of a sprawling, tin-shanty town with a few more pretentious buildings, houses, shops and shipping firms. Slums and prosperity huddle close together, making the whole place squalid. There are few houses along the sea front and few palm trees. The residential quarter, in which most of the British officials and merchants live, laid out on a grid of avenues and roads, distinguished from each other only by an



## THE CASTLE OF KING CHRISTIAN

ordinal prefix, is tropical suburbia at its worst, and from most houses there is scarcely the compensation of a sight of the sea. The gardens are infertile laterite sand, in which some of the inhabitants obtain a precarious privacy from thin hedges of 'nim'; they sometimes manage to grow a few bright flowers, but the water supply is inadequate for gardening, and you have even to get up in the morning early if you want to get a bath before the supply runs short.

Down on the sea shore we finished at last our drive from sea to sea, and contrasted the grey green thundering surf of the Gulf of Guinea with the nostalgic blue of the Mediterranean. On our right was the promontory where are the old Ussher and James Forts, now used as prisons, on our left the castle at Christiansborg where the Governor lives. This, I think, is the one building in Accra which gives pleasure. We lunched there one of the days we were in Accra, with Sir Alan and Lady Burns, and were much attracted to its historic atmosphere.

Christiansborg castle stands up against all the surf of the Atlantic, looking southwards with no land mass between it and the South Pole. Climbing a wide flight of steps we entered a gate with the cypher of King Christian and the date 1790 above it, and found ourselves in a cobbled courtyard facing another flight of steps leading up to the main castle. This was a scene which clearly had confronted new arrivals, voluntary and involuntary, for a long, long time, and its old-world atmosphere and a sense of solidarity about it all gave me more pleasure than anything I had seen in the general shoddiness and characterlessness of Accra.

After lunch Sir Alan showed us the sights. When he opened a door leading on to the ramparts facing the sea a great gale blew in, but there in the sun and spray below was a battery of Danish guns still facing out to sea. One could not talk, for the thunder of the pounding waves drowned all other sound. Within the castle Sir Alan pointed out what he called the rogues gallery, the portraits of all the British Governors. I thought with Omar Khayyam:

"How Sultan after Sultan with his pomp  
Abode his hour or two and went his way."

Less ephemeral were the prints of the castles of the Gold Coast, Cape

Coast, Elmina and so on, each with its story of a tougher age in which white people did not last long on the Gold Coast. I see from old records (a return presented to the House of Commons in 1826), that between the 25th of September 1823, and the 24th of December, 1825, 1,567 Europeans were sent to West Africa, most of them apparently to the Gold Coast, and that 906 died, 42 were killed in battle and 24 invalided home. Down below we saw the dungeons in which, of old, slaves were stored pending export. Daylight came in through narrow windows in the walls which were many feet thick. The mighty walls are built of stone largely imported from Europe.

Sir Alan, in addition to being a colonial administrator who has not only had long service—forty-two years—but has devoted himself, with a rare insight and great belief in their future, to the welfare of the African, is in his spare time a keen ornithologist, and he showed us the remnants of his collection of birds. I say remnants because the greater part had already left for the London Zoo, and most of the remainder were to go with him. It is really only in aviaries such as this, or in the Zoo, that the ordinary person can see these brilliant birds to their full advantage. It is difficult to appreciate their colours and their glories wild in the bush, for brilliant as they are, and dull as the bush is, they somehow seem to show up slightly in their natural surroundings, and are difficult to approach near enough to see their full beauty. Amongst them were some marvellous, highly-coloured turacos and many weaver birds which he had collected by request. Now, however, at the last moment he had been asked not to take the latter home as the Zoo must not accept any more grain-eating birds. What a comment this is on the food situation in England!

Lady Burns took us round the garden which she and Captain Hamilton, the A.D.C., have created. In bygone times it had consisted of little but crotons and other ornamental shrubs. Now it was arranged on the lines of a formal garden with a great, long lawn surrounded by what seemed to me a very original and beautiful hedge. It was clipped as a formal hedge should be, but it was of *bourgainvilleas* of a great variety of colours, and the mixture of vari-coloured flowers in the dark green of the hedge would have given inspiration to a fabric designer. There were some extraordinarily beautiful beds of well-grown cannas of different colours in full bloom, including a

striking flesh-coloured variety. There was indeed a great richness about the variety of tropical flowers in this garden, and there was also a refreshingly cool collection of ferns in a shelter at one side of the garden.

Lady Burns leaves this pleasance a place of real beauty, a tropical edition of the lovely gardens of Royal Palaces at home. Perhaps it consumes more water than a garden should in a place where supplies are so short, but it is a necessary setting to the Castle and there is certainly nothing else so beautiful in Accra; and beauty is almost as great a necessity as baths. Having now brought their garden to perfection Sir Alan and Lady Burns have given the public an opportunity of seeing it, and one hopes that this tradition will be continued by their successors at regular intervals, in the way that beautiful gardens are opened to visitors at home.

May it be a place, like Po-Chü-i's flower fair, where

"Leisure and pleasure drift along,  
 Beggar and Marquis join the throng,  
 And care, humility, rank, and pride  
 In the sight of the flowers are laid aside.  
 Bright, oh! bright are a thousand shades,  
 Crimson splashes and slender blades  
 With five white fillets bound."

It is not only that there is a lack of natural beauty in Accra, there is a shortage of almost everything that makes for the right use of leisure. Africa emergent needs cultural activity and its absence may well have catastrophic results.

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Our arrival at Accra on the Gulf of Guinea ended our journey from Ash in Kent, and the cross-section from Algiers to Accra gave me a very good idea of the various zones of a region which is rapidly growing in importance. Yet it must not be thought that there is not a greater variety in the country than it was possible to see on the route we followed, and this applies particularly to the regions further from the Sahara with a greater rainfall. In the few months we had been in the country we had seen some of this variety, not so much of vegetation but of human culture and progress.

West of Navrongo, for instance, is Wa on the Black Volta. There the architecture is not the typical round hut of the parkland belt of which it is a part, but Islamic. There is little of real Islam left among the people. They have in religion and in other things 'gone back to bush'; but several hundred years ago Wa must have been, I think, an outpost of the great Mali Empire of the Sudan, which had a culture said to have rivalled that of contemporary Moorish Spain. Islamic architecture still lingers along the Black Volta, which may have been the gold route from Ashanti. Near Wa there were also ancient gold workings. I liked the place for its historic feeling. Here culture had once lingered, trying to make a home, but then, liking not the drab surroundings, had flown away, leaving only the gracious perfume of its passage.

Then there is Krachi, which is quite different and lies on an eastern road to Accra on the edge of the forest belt. Its architecture is the rectangular pent roof building of the forest culture. It has a beautiful view over the Volta valley and the forest-clad mountains 2,500 feet high, but much more than this I like Krachi for its local social contacts. One of these was Paul Hutter, eighty in May, 1947. He has been in the Gold Coast since 1892 when he started his career as a Swiss missionary. He then became a trader and has lived in his present house since 1903. One does not go to Krachi without visiting Paul, and, while drinking his beer, listen to tales of bygone times. Krachi is still to some extent ruled by the Dente fetish, and Paul has heard the dying moans of its victims buried up to their necks, because Dente does not like blood to be shed. In 1914 he had thwarted the Germans by stealing their boats from the other side of the river. He is apt to tell you that he hates Africans because they have no gratitude, but he belies his words by caring for sick Africans around. Now, straight and erect though he is, he says he is just waiting for death. He has his coffin ready and has just bought a set of smart brass handles for it.

The Kpeglos, Gilbert, his wife half English, and his brother Kofi, are all Achimota educated. They also live in Krachi and Gilbert told me a lot about a fetish cult called Tigari which started, so he says, up in Wa, and is based on the ten commandments. If you keep them you prosper, if not your punishment is now and not hereafter.

He told me of a chief who had just died of Tigari after confessing to many murders. A would-be Tigari agent pays the founder a couple of hundred pounds after which he receives the key to its mysteries and can administer it. He gets his money back from new members in his district, who pay thirty shillings, a fowl and a sheep in order to join. I wondered whether a cult like this does not rise in the same way as a faith. It sounded to me as if the founder, learning of the ten commandments through mission contacts, had had a period of solitude in the bush reflecting on the abuses around him, and then worked out this new 'faith,' which though it has some elements of good, is largely evil. Gilbert thinks Christianity can make its way provided Africans can get away from their environment. He does not believe that where people live in their home surroundings with tribal deities which require blood, they will ever quite shake free from fetishism. He thinks perhaps that if psychology were taught in schools so that children might understand why their minds worked in the way they do, it might effect a cure.

The young Dutch Father of the Trans-Volta Mission, was much concerned with the influence of Tigari, which he believes to be of the devil. Lately a woman of his congregation had leapt up at mass and dashed out to perform the Tigari dance.

On a later visit, Krachi provided another example of mixed cultures. It was full of the coming postponed celebration of Corpus Christi, which the people in the market called Corporal Cristy. In the pleasant little market place, shaded with great trees, where you can still buy Venetian beads that have come down across the Sahara, the tailors were pedalling away for dear life sewing Corpus Christi banners. As we stood there we heard a brass band approaching. It was a strange company that marched before it in three ranks, as the modern drill book requires. The foremost threes were children, behind them were men and women. Children and all had loads upon their heads; the children had small suitcases and bundles, the women had full woven baskets, the men had larger suitcases with a pair of highly-polished boots on top of them. Three of the women had piccins bound upon their backs. The column marched in perfect time, swinging their arms like grenadiers: the heads of the piccins swung from side to side. When they saw us they came to a halt,

and I wondered if grenadiers, balancing their luggage upon their heads, could march and halt thus without upsetting it. The band played God save the King, and then struck into a southern tune called Konkomba. This is a popular air for the dance called 'High Life.' All the column began to sway to the rhythm. The children swayed, the men swayed, the women swayed and the piccins swayed on their mothers backs. I began to sway myself, and looking round found that every passer-by, every loiterer in the market place, and every stall-holder was swaying too! . . . Yes, there is company in Krachi, and a variety about it.

The chiefs and people of the Northern Territories are yet in many respects primitive, so it was a most refreshing experience to meet at Odumase, on our way to Accra, one of the southern chiefs, Nene Azzu Mate Kolo, the Konor of Manya Krobo. He is a young man of great charm with pleasant, easy manners. His father, a man of considerable character, had made him join the police as an ordinary constable after he had been educated at Achimota. The young chief showed us portraits of his father and grandfather. The latter was a well-known friend of the British who had served as an officer with Sir Garnet Wolseley in the Ashanti war. We saw a portrait of him in his scarlet uniform, and he had been presented with a sword by Queen Victoria. This his grandson showed us.

Mate Kolo's father had served in the 1896 campaign against Ashanti, and was a friend of Baden-Powell. He claimed that Baden-Powell got two ideas from his father which he worked into the Boy Scout organization. One was the left handshake, the sign of a secret society of brotherhood in this State, and the other the staff. The Krobo walking stick is a pole with a forked end, originally intended for setting off gun traps, and when Mate Kolo went out with us he took one of his staffs with him.

He gave me a most interesting and balanced picture of his own State, dealing with finance and development and going through each activity of Government. He pointed out the schools on a map and I was astonished how many there were. Fifty-seven per cent of the children of school-going age are in schools. Most of the schools are missionary run and principally Wesleyan. On the government of the State he confessed that it could not be said to be truly democratic.

## EIGHT THOUSAND MILES COMPLETED

The membership of councils was almost confined to the chiefly class, but there was a finance committee on which anybody able enough could sit. I don't think the young man was really democratic at heart, and I don't quite see how he could be expected to be for I think his idea was that if chiefs became enlightened and progressive there was no particular reason why the common people should supplant them with the power. At the same time he was enlightened and progressive, and by no means unconscious of the power of the people and the necessity for considering their opinions, for in these southern States the people can destool their ruler. He emphasized too that the rule of chiefs was what the people liked and were used to, so to that extent they had the kind of government they wanted.

On the 9th of July, 1947, between Salaga and Tamale, on our way back from that first visit to Accra, the speedometer reached 8,595 miles. In twenty long weeks since we had started from Uphousden we had covered eight thousand miles of country fresh to us, mostly red earth and bush. What a lot to think about!

## Chapter XIX

### I LOOK AT THE MAP AGAIN: AND REFLECT ON THE PROBLEMS IT EVOKES

*And all Arabia breathes from yonder box.*

POPE.

Now, therefore, I will speake somewhat of the people and their manners, and manner of living, with another brieft description of Africa also. It is to be understood that the people, which now inhabite the regions of the coast of Guinea and the middle parts of Africa . . . were in old time called *Aethiopes* and *Nigritae*, which we now call *Moores*, *Moorens*, or *Negroes*, a people of beastly living, without a God, lawe, religion, or commonwealth, and so scorched and vexed with the heat of the sunne that in many places they curse it, when it riseth. . . .

*Libya Interior* is very large and desolate, in the which are many horrible wildernesses and mountaines, replenished with divers kinds of wilde and monstrous beastes and serpents. First from *Mauritania* or *Barbary* toward the south is *Getulia*, a rough and savage region, whose inhabitants are wilde and wandering people. After these follow the people called *Melanogetuli* and *Pharsii*, which wander in the wilderness, carrying with them great gourdes of water. The *Ethiopia*ns, called *Nigritae*, occupy a great part of *Africa*, and are extended to the west ocean. Southward also they reach to the river *Nigritis*. . . . It . . . bringeth forth . . . beastes as the crocodile. . . . It is furthermore marveilous and very strange that is said of this river. And this is that, on the one side thereof, the inhabitants are of high stature and black, and, on the other side, of browne or tawnie colour and low stature, which thing also our men confirme to be true.

RICHARD EDEN ON JOHN LOK'S VOYAGE, 1554-5.

Good Lord, what is man? For as simple he looks,  
Do but try to develop his hooks and his crooks!  
With his depths and his shallows, his good and his evil;  
All in all he's a problem must puzzle the devil.

BURNS.

*The religions of all nations are derived from each nation's different reception of the poetic genius, which is everywhere called the spirit of prophecy.*

WILLIAM BLAKE.



## THE MAP TAKES ON NEW MEANINGS

*And he gave it for his opinion, that whoever could make two ears of corn, or two blades of grass, to grow upon a spot of ground where only one grew before, would deserve better of mankind, and do more essential service to his country, than the whole race of politicians put together.*

SWIFT. *Gulliver's Travels.*

*Remember that all things are only opinion and that it is in your power to think as you please.*

MARCUS AURELIUS.

WE had reached Tainale at the hottest and driest time of the year and the big lawn in front of our house was all burnt up. The afternoons were hot and breathless and not a leaf on a tree stirred. We had our tea in a semicircle of chairs round a couple of small tables standing on a patch of red, grassless "lawn" in the shade of a great mango tree heavy with fruit. From their nests of woven leaves large red ants dropped from the tree and crawled over our chairs and our dripping arms. In Zanzibar we called these ants *maji moto* or hot water, which explains sufficiently how unpleasant they were.

When tea had been cleared away I sat, daily, writing and occasionally looking over the "miles and miles of bloody Africa" (as a hot District Commissioner is said to have called the bush) which lay before me. To-day, having finished the story of our journey, I spread out on the tables in front of me our two four-million sheets of North-West and West Africa to clarify and summarize the conclusions I had reached. My mind was so full of thoughts stimulated by our experiences that I had to get them on to paper and in some sort of order.

A thin red line marked our route from Algeria southwards and called to mind the variety of scenes we had witnessed. After a journey like this a map takes on new meanings and emphasis. The lessons it teaches become more evident and vivid when one has traversed the country itself, and it recalls pictures which it could not even indicate before. It is no longer a coloured sheet of browns and greens with a red line across it, but people, rocks, sand, trees, animals. There are green patches which are yellow sand, and yellow patches which are often green mountains. There are names which mean mysterious towns in oases. There are others which mean a little well, or a meeting with Tuareg in a desert, or a conversation with an

administrator and his wife in a bungalow on a moonlit night in the bush.

From ice and snow in Europe we had come to green and flowers in North Africa. We had seen the beauties of the Atlas mountains, far and away the best scenery of the journey. We had passed through the sand and rocks of the desert and watched its changing hues as the sun repeated its daily journey, and we had passed through the endless bush. Finally we had seen the great forest and reached the shores of the Atlantic.

Dropping degree by degree of latitude to the south the influence of climate on the surface of the globe and on all creation was clearer than it can ever be by the study of maps and text-books. The adaptation of the habits, even of the faith, of man to his environment was as clear as that of the fauna and flora. And the linking up of the countries of varying people by this long road brought home their interdependence on each other.

This interdependence is very evident. What is strange is that for so long we should have struggled against it. Yet the forces of this contracting world demand that we should now develop this natural tendency. Europe and Africa are complementary to each other. The regions of Africa cannot naturally be kept apart. Everything that makes for unity should be encouraged, any barriers which separate should be broken down.

From the time we left the ship at Calais until we reached the tiny village of Paga on the frontier of the Gold Coast we were travelling under French protection. We journeyed through rich lands, desert lands and poor lands, through vast and sparsely inhabited countries to others in which there is a great population. Such a journey, made at such a time, with a knowledge of contemporary events, could only emphasize this interdependence of countries and peoples, and underline the need for co-operation—even for unity.

Europe can provide the scientific skill and the machinery, Africa can provide the labour and the food. How easy it is to make this sound like exploitation, but yet you have only to visit the countries to realize that, even if it were desired, exploitation is impossible. Western Europe has not the forces to support exploitation: the days have gone by when African forces are going to assist in the exploitation

of their own people. Western European culture is sought after by the Africans. It can only come by a raising of the African standard of living. Africa needs the food and so does Europe. There are all the elements in the situation favourable for a free and vital partnership. There is in Western Europe and in Africa a desire for this co-operation, and for a partnership of *free* peoples. It means in a large degree the development and security of the vital freedoms for them all.

The ideal of course is that there should be a federal government for all these territories, and one day something like that will have to come as a stage towards world government. But I doubt if any of the peoples concerned are yet wise enough to be able to achieve a federation. None the less, there are steps towards it which they can take. There is the exchange of information already largely achieved. There is co-operation in technical matters and the pooling of technical resources, and there are schemes of joint development. It is in the political field that there is likely to be most difficulty, and surely here it must be the African who has the final say.

Both British and French have in a sense the same aims. We want to raise African standards, and we want to keep Africa with us in Europe. The great stumbling block is the difference in method. The French want to keep Africa in Europe by making the African French, and the British want to do it by leading them to free partnership in the British Commonwealth in association with Western Europe. There is a lot of difference between a black citizen of France (if he can be achieved on any wide scale) and an African subject of His Majesty in a self-governing African dominion in the British Commonwealth of Nations. What is certain, however, is that, with goodwill and greater contact, much could be achieved by discussion on political development between colleagues in the field. As a matter of fact, whatever French metropolitan policy may be, I am quite sure that many of the administrators in the field have much the same ideas as ours. In the Sahara and the nomadic parts of the Niger, in particular, I could see no difference between French practice and what we call indirect rule.

What the next step is, after consultation, I do not know. Certainly no sort of condominium is possible. With the best will in the world it never works. The New Hebrides and Tangiers are

## I LOOK AT THE MAP AGAIN

unhappy examples of it, and having seen quadripartite rule in Berlin I should hate to see anything like it inflicted upon Africa. Indeed, we must cease to think in terms of dominion at all, and it would probably help us all to come to a workable solution if we thought more of Africa as African and forgot the pink and the mauve. But I do not think that integrated administrations have yet been proved a failure. I have heard good reports of League of Nations' administration in Danzig and the Saar in the early days, and I think there might be a lot to be said for European and African officers in British administrations being lent to French, and vice versa. Then again, common training courses for officers in French and British administrations could be a most excellent thing, and English and French should be as necessary for officers on Anglo-French frontiers as the languages of the tribes they are working with.

There are many lesser difficulties. The multiplicity of languages is one of them. There is the fact that French officials have not the same liberty to move in and out of our territories as we have to visit them. This will probably be smoothed away, for the French central authorities are just as keen on collaboration as ours are. I feared there might be a certain French mistrust of working very closely with us, but I found in almost every case enthusiasm for it and a real appreciation of its need. I am not so sure that the average senior British Colonial officer is nearly so keen. He is keen enough on good social relations, but he often seems to think we have nothing to learn from the French and that their administration is less good and less humane than ours. He generally does not even like the idea of French technical experts working in our territories. For myself I do not think everything is good about the French administration, but then I do not think that of our own. I prefer the British aims and methods, perhaps to some extent because I know them better, but I am sure there is much we can learn from the French and much that I have seen in their colonies I should like to copy in ours.

Whatever the difficulties it is inevitable that some union must eventually come about because of the natural interdependence, and because events are leading towards it. The problem is to help it forward. The alternatives do not seem to bear contemplation for any one or two of the three partners involved.

## AFRICA IN THE FLOOD OF WORLD THOUGHT

Both French and British methods *can*, or so I think, lead to the same result, namely the governance of Africa by its own people in close association with us both, but if this is to be successfully achieved it seems to me on first sight that a much more active and sympathetic human contact, neither parental nor schoolmasterly, is necessary between us and the people we are helping. And I believe we need to be, more of us, individually believers in and practisers of democracy as a way of life. One is apt to be thought to be talking politically when one says a thing like that, and civil servants, or at least British ones, must eschew politics, but the fact is that man, whether a civil servant or not, is a political animal, not because he may take the label of a political party, but because he develops beliefs in ways of living.

Many people believe that much of the trouble among so-called dependent peoples is due to our preaching self-government too quickly. Quite apart from the fact that most of the more vocal of the people concerned think we are too slow in our approach, there is a fundamental error in this. It is not really a question of politics, in the sense in which civil servants abjure it, at all. It is a question of human evolution, the direction taken by a world current of thought, and politicians, be they of the right or left, can do very little about it. They and those they direct may hope to guide it a little, but they can do nothing to dam it nor even seriously to divert it. It is far too big.

I myself believe that to-day the only really safe way of life which is still practicable adds up to something very like what is called social democracy, and it is that which we need to teach the African and that which is the least he is likely to accept.

These remarks apply mainly to Africa south of the Sahara. In Algeria I had felt, however superficially, the politics of Algiers, and wondered what effect those politics would have on North and West Africa. Knowing and liking both French and Arabs, I could understand the latter's desire to have the independence of the Middle Eastern countries, and the difficulties the former were bound to have in giving it to them after having regarded Algeria as an integral part of France for so long. In the territories further south I could feel nothing but admiration for the work that the French have done in

## I LOOK AT THE MAP AGAIN

the greatest desert in the world. I had learnt something of the work of the great desert figures of the past, and I had admired the spirit which moved their successors, men who love the desert and its people and understand them intimately. I had also seen and admired equally the pioneering spirit which had opened up transport across these vast wastes.

There are perhaps even greater difficulties in this Arab problem than in the areas further south. Surely, however, interdependence must again win the day, and there be not only a union of Western Europe, of the British Commonwealth, of the Colonies of the Western powers, but of the countries of the Middle East as well. The Middle East is the great "joining" area, and the Arabic-speaking people have much justification for regarding it as a source of civilization.

\* \* \*

Throughout our journey there was much to make me think of the effect of environment on man's spiritual life. This I believe to be very relevant. It is not so much a kaleidoscope of religions, manners and customs which the map unfolds for me, but an ordered progression illustrating plainly the influence of environment on the human race. To Christian France succeeded the strange medley of religion, or lack of it, inseparable from a great seaport such as Algiers. In the desert there burned, as there will always burn unassailed, the flame of the faith of the one God. As the desert gave way to bush and forest the more complex influence of the unseen things of nature asserted itself, and as we passed deeper into Africa animism rapidly became the dominant feature. Islam in these more southerly areas of the Sudan is quite degenerate: a few of the forms exist and the *fatiha*, ill-pronounced and not in the least understood, may be recited when you enter a house where the fetish rules. Of the spirit of Islam, the brotherhood of man, nothing is known. There are good and sincere Christians where there are missions, but where the Christians are not attached to missions I believe it to be true that they tend to maintain their own social customs.

Animism, fetishism, magic. All those things which we class conveniently under the term "paganism". Are they really paganism if paganism means lack of a monotheistic belief? For there are those

who hold that the animists do essentially believe in one God. But can one build a sure civilization on animism? Christianity and Islam, Judaism and Zoroastrianism, the philosophy of Buddhism, for examples, are, I think, faiths or beliefs which can share in and contribute something to the progress of human thought and happiness, but *can* the same be said of animism and fetishism?

All of us believe in religious toleration, the right of each soul to worship God in the way that seems to him best, but time and again during the contacts of our long journey I have wondered where these primitive beliefs stand in the building of a new Africa, and indeed of a new world.

Living amongst peoples of many different faiths has steadily developed in me the conclusion that all religion depends to a large extent for its form on environment. There is a religious instinct in all humanity, but the higher faiths of the world—the monotheistic faiths and the purer philosophies allied to them—seem to require prophets or founders to formulate them and depend, firstly, on the particular environment in which the founder has grown up, and secondly, on the response in him to the “still, small voice”, in some cases louder and more insistent than in others, which develops in him an intense feeling against what he sees bad in that environment. How well that voice is heard determines whether the hearer is a prophet. If the urge is sufficiently strong he is driven to a period of solitude. This is the third and most characteristic factor in the formulation of a “revealed” religion. Circumstances determine whether the potential prophet passes his period of solitude in desert, on mountain top, in the depth of the forest or the hermit’s cell. During this period of solitude there takes place within him the gradual formulation of a faith; he sees clearly the truths bred in him by the emotions which drove him to solitude, he develops a fire in the belly.

The more uncomplicated the scene of his solitude, the higher the form of the faith developed. Thus it is that the greatest inspiration in the world has come out of the deserts, where communion with nature in its elemental form infallibly brings home the unity of God, His might, majesty, dominion and power, His mercy and compassion. Finally, comes the urge to preach the truth discovered and the return to mankind to do it.

## I LOOK AT THE MAP AGAIN

The faith so formed, based as it is on eternal verities, will find listeners everywhere, for there is something not only divine but human in it. It will flourish best in the environment from which the preacher came, for he has found the answers to its problems in his solitude. In the later development of the faith it reacts to the environments to which it is transported. It is already at second-hand. It lacks the original touchstone—the desert for example—and is affected by the particular histories of those who rediffuse it. Thus sects spring up.

I think these factors follow from a study of the great faiths. Moses, developing a burning sense of injustice at the suffering of his people as an oppressed minority in Egypt, is driven to the wilderness. There, brooding on their wrongs and seeing infallibly God and His attributes, he knows that He will deliver this people from their oppression and grant them peculiarly a promised land in which they dominate all others. This faith and belief in a chosen race is formed because Moses' outlook was confined by the nature of things to the one people to whom he belonged and who were oppressed. He returns to Egypt and leads his people out of captivity. Like so many oppressed classes, once free of their oppressors they not only accepted the freedom that was rightly theirs, but developed the belief that the world owed all to them, and that they had little or no duties towards their neighbours. Thus I think is to be explained the constant falls of the Israelites from grace, and out of this comes the uncompromising insistence on the pound of flesh. They flourished best when they were oppressed or in dispersion, and the voice of the desert in the most inspired of their literature is to be clearly heard as prophet after prophet recalled them to the worship of the one God. In dispersion the Jews have suffered much and the world *does* owe much to them. As a race they have borne much with a fortitude that excites wonder and admiration. While it stirs pity and sympathy it should also rouse a closer feeling of kinship with them, and a desire not to show mere charity to them but to treat them as we would ourselves wish to be treated. In dispersion and in suffering the Jews as a race have lost much of their old harshness, but it is sad that the old uncompromising insistence on what some of them consider their rights should still cause them as a race to lose so much goodwill.



## DESERT INFLUENCE ON RELIGION

In the faith preached by Jesus the influences of upbringing and the desert are again to be found; I see Him as a sensitive and unusual boy brought up in a village community, dominated by the self-righteousness of a priestly caste who had long lost the desert inspiration of their founder and were forming sects. With the common lack of clarity of their kind they point the finger of scorn at His mother on account of His birth. The love of a mother for a son who is "different" from her other children is intensified by the protective instinct aroused by their attitude. Her gentleness, and the love and care of a gentle foster father for His mother and Himself arouses in Jesus a strong sense of their injustice to His mother and of reaction against their hypocrisy. This develops in Him a fierce sympathy for all those who are poor and oppressed as He grows up, and I believe that that home environment, followed by the period in the wilderness, explains Jesus' teaching, for it was there that He developed His powers and the faith of the universal fatherhood and love of God.

In the case of Muhammad, the influences of his history and the desert are also to be clearly seen. He becomes disgusted with the commercialization of religion by the Meccans who manufacture images and contemptuously exploit credulous pilgrims. This reaction is aroused by long caravan journeys, which bring him in contact with Christians and Jews from whom he learns something of a higher faith. Then the spirit drives him to his reflections in the cave of Hira, looking out on those desolate barren valleys of the Hejaz. There he developed the infallible feeling of the might of the one God, the power He had to sweep away all these monstrous abuses, and the necessity for submission to His will. The unity of God and submission to His will are inescapable conclusions in the desert, and this is why Islam flourishes far more than any other faith in the desert regions of the world. There are desert tribes who know very little about the precepts of Islam but are none the less natural Muslims, and Islam maintains its strength in the cities and settled areas within the desert belt because it is so frequently renewed and strengthened by contact with the desert. The zone in which it flourishes most stretches from the shore of the Atlantic right across North Africa, the Middle East, Persia and Afghanistan to the Gobi desert. Other centres in which it flourishes, such as the East African coast and Indonesia, maintain

it in a strong form simply by continuous contacts with Arabia. If this continuous renewal does not take place it tends to become obscured and never to break down indigenous faiths. Even in Malaya and East Africa the pure faith of Islam is much obscured by the simpler beliefs of the natives. In parts of West Africa through which we passed, Islamic contacts have often become no more than purely nominal, for there is not a sufficient influx of missionary zeal from the desert. Thus in Islam, as in other faiths, the influence of environment in modifying it from its desert standards is clearly seen, and the existence of sects and schools in Islam, as in other religions, can be similarly explained.

So in the same way the influence of wide horizons in his forty years on a mountain top can be seen in the preaching of Zarathustra, for the Zoroastrian is also monotheistic. The highest form of a religious philosophy, on the other hand, is Buddhism, and the Buddha's solitude in the forest and meditations under the bo-tree account, I think, not only for the sublimity in his philosophy but also for his failing to recognize the one God.

There seems no doubt that it is not solitude alone but solitude in the desert which reveals the one God who is mighty to help. It needs a prophet, and the fact of Islam's overwhelming insistence on the unity of God is no doubt due to Muhammad having been so much a man of the desert himself. Yet, as I have indicated, there are considerable differences between the faith of the illiterate beduin and that of the orthodox Muslim. Once, when I was crossing an arm of the Empty Quarter with a friend, our beduin guide constantly forgot the name of my companion and frequently addressed him as "O thou whose father is God." He was an unlettered nomad who knew no theology. I remarked on this to an orthodox Muslim of the towns who was shocked. "We are not sons of God," he declared, "only the slaves or servants. God does not beget." Here I think the man of the desert—part of the desert—had seen further than the prophet who came from the town to the desert, for he had perceived, intuitively, the spiritual rather than the physical.

Just as "beduinism" grows naturally from the desert, so Taoism grows naturally from the landscape of China. I think we all have a picture of Chinese—or Japanese—gardens in our minds, and judging

from the only Far Eastern one I have seen it is not so very wrong. The gardens are a reproduction of the landscape in miniature and show how important their landscape is to the Chinese. There is a religious significance in these gardens and if you look at a Chinese landscape painting and see the tiny figures of men as a part of the picture, one with the flowers and trees and not its central feature, it is not difficult to see how the Taoist has absorbed his belief in the kinship of man and nature in all its aspects and how faithfully he presents it.

Taoism is the natural expression of the environment of so much of China, yet lacking the prophet with desert experience it failed to discover the one God. In fact it is possible that the faith invented the prophet and endowed him with the philosophy so naturally conceived, for there is doubt as to whether Lao-Tzu actually existed at all. Yet the story of Lao-Tzu's end, almost all that is known of him, reads so much like the prophet urged to go forth to the wilderness that it makes him very real. The call, if such it was, came to him very late in life. Setting out from the state of Chou where he had spent all his life, he reached the pass to the Outer World and was there asked by the officer in charge to write a book. Thus it was that he set down in a book of five thousand words the message of Taoism ending it with a brief lament on himself, from which one may perceive his need for the yet undiscovered God. Then with his face to the West he vanished beyond the frontier. But Lao-Tzu never came back to preach what he learned.

Considering how forest and jungle elsewhere seem to have overcome man's mind it is interesting to observe how in India man has grown with and into his environment. Here is another faith without a prophet which also includes the world with man. The clue to this may be that the Aryans of India were invaders who possibly brought philosophy with them into the forest which then gave it its own stamp. The doctrine of rebirth seems, too, a lesson which can grow naturally out of a forest environment. Indeed I do not see how a contemplative mind in the forest depths could escape finding it reasonable. Nevertheless the sinister atmosphere of the forest does seem to have induced in later times the less pleasant manifestations of Hinduism which resemble in some respects the practices of the Ashanti forest.

Philosophies depend on the environment of the philosopher no

less than faiths on that of the prophet, and philosophies have risen not only in jungles but even more in cities. Thus the Whitehall of ancient China produced Confucius. Obviously solitude is as necessary to the city philosopher as to the desert prophet. Diogenes' tub and city walls are very limiting factors. The philosophy of the open landscape and the forest spreads wider and deeper and lasts longer than that of the city, but the garden, and still more the forest, obscures what the desert makes plain, for the message of the desert is the unchanging, everlasting nature of God, which *was* before the flowers and trees started, which *is* through all the changes of the life He set in motion, and which shall be ever the only strength and refuge.

The faith revealed in the desert to the One brought up in the village, whose boyhood years were spent on the flower strewn hills of Nazareth, brought God, man, and the rest of nature into a special perspective.

The early history of St. Paul, his fanaticism before his conversion, his bodily infirmities, the suddenness of his conversion on a desert way, account for the turn he gave to Christianity, making it much more formalistic and uncompromising than its founder had preached it. The rise of all various sects and schisms of Christianity is similarly to be attributed to the histories and environments of reformers, and the variety of climate and geography in the lands in which Christianity, in some form or another, flourishes, has done much to shape the forms it takes. Christianity is generally to be found at its best in villages, where life is simpler and less complicated than in the cities, for it was out of a village that Jesus came and in a village that He is still more clearly seen to-day.

It is true that a philosophy as lofty as Buddhism has come from the jungle, and Hinduism, for all the corruption it has suffered in its lower forms, has certainly in the minds of great thinkers produced its contribution to civilization. But the bush and forest of Africa have produced little or nothing in the way of religion or philosophy to help man on his upward climb.

The fact is that though the natural, open or garden environment attracts, the bush repels. It not only repels a sojourner like myself, but it repels the people themselves for they treat it as something evil and dangerous. There is little that the religions of the bush can have

## MORE CULTIVATION AND MORE CHRISTIANITY

in common with the faiths evolved in simpler environments, and it is doubtful if such faiths can naturally expand when transplanted in a soil so foreign to them. That they can be kept alive in a pure form at all seems to depend on constant renewal. Just as the culture and faith of the desert now makes little headway in the African bush and jungle owing to the lack of missionaries, so Christianity progresses because of the renewed stream of missionaries from the West.

In the African bush the environment is, I believe, gradually shaping Christianity to itself. Unless the environment changes very substantially it is likely that the form of African Christianity will be very different from that which is produced in a European environment. It will not have such recognition of the unity of God as is found in the teaching of Jesus, nor will it have the social laws developed by Christianity in the West. Thus it may maintain something of animism and nature worship and social habits such as polygamy.

If we agree, as I think we must, that Africa of the forest and bush needs more of the things of the spirit than her own beliefs can give her, then we must change the cramping effect of the bush and forest for something more open as fast as we can. Cultivation of the land means not only a higher material standard of living, but higher spiritual and moral standards. Christianity perhaps flourishes best in an agricultural countryside, and the more the bush and its influence disappear the better chance it is likely to have.

More cultivation and more Christianity are indeed desperately urgent. We are attending now to the former; should we not also see to the latter and, for instance, do far more to encourage the missionaries as essential partners in our development programmes? If we do not I foresee there is a grave danger that the African, finding his ancestral beliefs too slight to bear all that will be required of them, may make a religion of his politics and this could only be disastrous. Although we are not perhaps a very religious people, in the practising sense, most of what we do derives from a deep religious instinct which, I think, prevents us taking our politics violently and makes it possible for political adversaries to respect each other and be friends. Something of this spirit we have to give to others who have not the same traditions.

But there is one complication we bestow upon the Africans which

we did not have to suffer ourselves. Living in Kent a few miles from the Cathedral of St. Augustine, and in sight of the bay in which he landed, I remember the more easily that we had only one form of Christianity preached to us. How much more confusing and difficult do we make it for the African, particularly when we remember he has to attain an equality of civilization with us in less than a tenth of the time we have taken to reach our present standard. Our environment has of course adapted Roman Christianity to our own more sturdy climate, just as Africa is adapting the Christianity it receives, but the problem would be simplified and the result more satisfactory if we of the West could learn wisdom in such matters.

The problem confronting the Christian churches in the present day is a worldwide one. Africa is only one aspect of it. There is a cry from all Christendom that the Church shall come in and give a lead, bringing the world back to God. There is a growing belief that it is only thus that civilization, tottering on the brink of an abyss, can be saved. To this the Church's reply is that the person of Christ rather than His precepts is its concern, and that it must proclaim that and deliverance, salvation and redemption through Him rather than point to His preaching of the ethical idealism contained in it. Without a lead, however, Christians will continue to wallow in their sects and schisms, which not only do nothing to help them to put their own house in order, but scandalize the other brethren, for it is not only the Christians who are involved. No one can doubt that the world would be a much better place if we all practised the Sermon on the Mount, and no one can really doubt that if it goes on in its present way civilization is likely to come to an end before mankind accepts the goal of the Church, admitting for a moment that the common goal of all the Churches is what I have stated. If you accept this you cannot help feeling, at least I for one cannot, that the cry from Heaven, which was an echo from human hearts, "Peace on earth among men of goodwill" did not mean that men of goodwill were only Christians. "In my Father's house are many mansions."

The earthly Jerusalem is a fighting ground of many faiths, of many different Christian sects, who have fought and squabbled over trifles for centuries. On the same ground Jews, Christians and Muslims have been and are fighting each other impartially with a bitterness

## THE UNITY OF RELIGION

foreign to all their faiths. All this has happened and is happening on ground that is holy to the three great monotheistic faiths of the world, and yet there are fundamental principles common to the faiths preached by Moses, Jesus and Muhammad which, if put into practice, could arrest this scandal. There are men of goodwill, Jews, Christians and Muslims, who would readily join hands in preaching and living these common principles, if the leaders of the religions of the world were to give joint encouragement, which they could well do without sacrificing their own individual standpoints at all, if they would concentrate for the good of all mankind on the things that unite them rather than the things which divide them. Rightly or wrongly in every faith ethics are regarded as integral to religion, almost synonymous with it, and dependent for their sanctions on religion. This is really the fundamental thing.

It is fundamental in that it is the obvious beginning to an understanding that all religions are one, but if I do not make a digression here I shall be in danger of giving the impression that it may be the conclusion of the whole matter. One cannot just ignore the differences in religions, for it is as much their inner significance which testifies the unity of religion as the more apparent similarities. It may be difficult to recognize that it is even more the diversities of faith which proclaim their unity than the things which they apparently have in common. But at least all of us can recognize the similarities and surely they should help us to a unity of purpose.

The alternative to such a campaign for unity is perhaps a new prophet; a man brought up probably in the slums of some great industrial city, feeling the scandals and the tragedies of our time, to whom should come that voice driving him to the desert to communion with God, and to return to mankind with all the inspiration needed to draw humanity back from the abyss to which it draws so perilously close. This is not a thing within human control. What is certain is that the leaders of the faiths of mankind could do a great deal to draw the men of goodwill of all faiths to closer co-operation in the purposes of God which include the brotherhood of man. This done, peace on earth and the new Jerusalem is within our vision, and indeed a world government a far more easily attainable thing than it is now.

If the leaders of world faiths would acknowledge the similarities in

religion which unite them, and together preach the brotherhood of man, they would present an intelligible front to Africa, and surely provide a practical way to the universal realization of the Fatherhood of God. That would be only a beginning: a richer spiritual association would follow. For though the religions of bush and forest are too feeble to provide the needs of man in other than the most primitive conditions, they yet share in common with more advanced faiths a belief in eternity, however hesitantly and gropingly they may try to express it. Here, perhaps, is another starting point. For we live not only in space and time, but in eternity, and in this plane find eternal values which all can recognize, even though the changing signification of language makes it an inadequate vehicle to express them.

It does not help to insist on the necessity for dogma. However right one may be in believing that in God's good time all men will accept the formulated doctrines of any one particular faith, we must yet, if we are honest, admit that there is no likelihood of this happening in time to save humanity from the crisis which arises from the division of the world into two camps, those who believe in only material things, and those who believe that God is necessary. Africa, and much of the rest of the world, hovers hesitantly, not convinced which to join. Never was a common leadership more necessary. In co-operating to give this none of these great religions need sacrifice its own dogmas. There are lots of kinds of clocks. There are grandfather clocks, ormolu clocks, alarm clocks. Lots of clocks do not even have the same kind of faces: some do not have faces at all. Some of us prefer one kind, some another. Yet many of these clocks tell the time correctly and most will do so if the owners set them by Big Ben or the Greenwich time signal. I feel that if the religious leaders cannot agree on giving at least the time signal, many more of mankind must choose the way into the camp of the materialists, seeking food at least and despairing of the something more they need to regulate their lives.

The unity we need is there if we can but see or be helped to see, for the vision which St. John preached is essentially the same as that of the Sufis in Islam and all the other mystics. The Logos, the Karma, the Tao are really all one. It is not always or often that the flash of



vision comes to us, for most of us faith will come through working—and praying—together.

The system of Indirect Rule in Africa which we support is based to a large extent on fetishism or animism, for many of the rulers are priest-kings. And, too, one hears stories of the most civilized persons, lawyers of eminence and other educated people, some of them Christians whose families have for generations held Christian faith, indulging in or being a party to ritual sacrifices of a most horrible description. Will these people grow out of these beliefs, or if they do not grow out of them can they find in their ancestral faith that religious spirit which is a vital necessity to all real progress? Ritual human sacrifices we will not, and can never, tolerate in countries in which we have influence, but one wonders sometimes whether in view of the fact they are so important in some of the faiths classed as animism or fetishism, those faiths can exist without them, any more than Catholicism could exist if the sacrifice of the Mass were abolished. On the other hand, one may reflect that the Jewish faith has long flourished without the practice of monstrous deeds, such as Samuel's hewing of Agag in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal, which the Old Testament would have us believe were pleasing to Jehovah.

The influence of religion has a profound effect upon politics because it has a profound effect upon the nature of man himself. Without it we are in danger of thinking only of organic life, forgetting the personal, human aspect. The question, therefore, of the religious future of Africa is of fundamental importance.

Christianity and democracy always go well together in agricultural country, just as Islam and democracy do in more barren lands. Indeed our western democracy surely has Christianity as its foundation—a way of life based on love of and duty towards one's neighbour. Only the highest type of democracy can survive in conditions of hardship and poverty. Decent average democracy must grow out of a decent standard of living. If there is to be a decent standard of living in Africa, then development must speedily be taken further than the primitive methods of agriculture one sees here in the Northern Territories. These people have not even a plough of their own. And although during the last few years we have introduced a scheme of mixed farming, progress with it is desperately slow, and I cannot

believe that civilization can be quickly built up on a plough and a couple of oxen. The salvation of democracy lies in our showing that it can produce quickly a better standard of life than communism promises. This requires a lot of education of the young and of adults, and perhaps even a reasonable measure of direction of a docile, teachable people.

The greatest need in most dependent territories is still economic development to improve nutrition, to raise their standard of living and to make their contribution to the needs of an under-nourished world. This is not open to argument, but the economist generally holds that if his side of the house is attended to, difficult questions of political development will hardly arise.

Subject, however, to the proviso that to be viable at all a country has got to have some reasonable sort of economy, human emotions mean more than cold intellect. Even if a government's existence depends on its capacity to provide for adequate food, housing and employment, human passions and aspirations are not limited by these, and to-day there is probably not a race which does not want to be master in its own house more quickly than the self-appointed manager in residence thinks fit. Social and political development are therefore just as important as economic development and cannot lag behind because the economist says "leave it to me and you will have plenty of time to develop these things slowly and surely." I think it is probably true that where people have achieved responsibility in a political sense they take a much more realistic view of economic problems than they did before.

Modern world trends, the effects of religion, or the lack of it, the clash between East and West, all the politics that arise from Europe, cannot leave Africa untouched, either as regards the good that may emerge from them or the evil. Nationalism is a thing that has to be contended with as a natural stage in man's evolution growing out of his conception of freedom, his firm conviction that it is the inherent right of every race and people to manage its own affairs, and the growing realization by Africa of the truth that no race is inferior to another, nor may be kept in subjection to it. In Africa, as elsewhere, it is beginning to be realized that political independence cannot be real without at least the establishment of the four freedoms.

## PARTNERSHIP IN AFRICA

The problem is, while admitting nationalism as an inevitable step, to direct it towards a belief in world government in which everybody voluntarily sacrifices some sovereignty.

I have an uneasy feeling that the slow tempo at which Europe has been leading Africa to its goal of managing its own affairs is no longer practicable, and that the Africans themselves will not thank us for it. Things are moving so fast that if we do not change the tempo we may wake up one morning and discover that Africa has grown up—or blown up—overnight.\*

What we are after is surely that the peoples of Africa should accept us in the future willingly, as partners in the development of their countries, and that they should be willing and equal citizens with us not only in those countries but in Europe. It is often very difficult for people to accept this thesis, even if they accept the equality of all races of humanity and the principle of genuinely equal citizenship. The reason perhaps is that we in Europe have been so long rulers outside Europe that it is difficult for us at first to realize that if Europe is to survive we must make the new conception of partnership more real. We should want this not because we want Europe to dominate mankind, but because we wish to maintain the freedom of mankind. Perhaps what has caused us most trouble in the face of the growing forces of nationalism is the fact that we have never, even if we have considered the matter, felt able to fix a period of time within which countries under our tutelage can be brought to self-government, with all it implies. In the Empire we need to do all we can to ensure that when they have reached it they remain as willing partners. Part of the task is to teach our concept of democracy to them lest by too different thinking they break away. Civic development, which some call mass education, needs much more active attention. The need for it is primary.

Realizing the state of things in Europe, you cannot make such a journey as ours without feeling this need for a speeding up of the tempo. This does not imply the abandonment of the principle of

\* These words were written in April 1947. It will have been realized already that I am writing mainly with the untutored primitives of the interior in mind. Since then I have got to know some of the intelligentsia, and after the events of early 1948 I do not think anyone will accuse me of being alarmist.

building up on such native institutions as are serviceable, though it may imply that a good deal of jerrybuilding may be necessary to preserve the foundations already laid. Prefabricated democracy is not likely to prove a satisfactory substitute for the more solidly built structure, but it may very well be forced upon us by circumstances, not as a substitute for a more permanent structure, but to give us a breathing space in which to hasten slowly with the larger task.

It does also seem that indirect *rule* is rapidly growing inappropriate, if it has not already become so, not only for the reason that rule, however indirect, is inappropriate in the new principle of partnership, but because chiefs must either become the democratically elected representatives and rulers of their people, or develop into constitutional "monarchs" with democratically elected representatives of the people to take responsibility for carrying out the will of the people. This perhaps is not so difficult as it may sound, for some dependence of a chief on the will of his people is a not uncommon feature of the traditional African political structure.

It is not sufficient answer to all this to say that the yet primitive Africans—still by far the bulk of the population—may not want rapid development on civic, political, social and economic lines. They themselves are less aware than we should be of what is marching on them. God forbid that we should resort to compulsion to enforce new methods suddenly on them, but it would be surely wrong not more actively and more speedily to educate them and direct them. Personally I am sure that intelligent Africans, however primitive, will welcome all developments they are offered.

Thinking black or thinking brown is a principle on which many of us who have been engaged in helping other races forward have long acted, but this does not mean thinking only on the lines of the maintenance of traditional forms any more than thinking white means only thinking as our Anglo-Saxon forefathers thought. Our thinking may be influenced by the past and the primitive, but it must be conditioned by thinking of the present as it is, and of the common future of all races.

For myself I came through the desert and bush of West Africa into the back door of the Northern Territories full of this sense of urgency. After one short look at the chiefs and indirect rule and the naked

man with the hoe, who stood stooped over the clod he broke, immobilized into a statue of bronze, to watch the cloud of dust roll by, I felt convinced that in this way primitive Africa could never catch up with the rest of the world. Of course I met men just as secure in the opposite conviction who knew Africa a great deal better than I. They held the belief I had held myself till the accumulative experience of the Middle East, Germany and my journey now ending had caused me to abandon it. Put briefly this view is that you must build slowly on a foundation of native institutions, that the people must evolve from hoe, through bullock and plough to mechanical tractor. Change, yes, but a gradual change under tutelage for a term that could not yet be foreseen. Meantime the people must be protected. . . .

I cannot help sympathizing with those who hold such views as these and regretting not only the inevitable passage of the picturesque (for I prefer the artistry of the man with the hoe to the clatter of the tractor), and the romantic (for incubators, mechanical milkers, artificial insemination and the like take almost the last breaths of romance out of the farmyard), but also, and much more sincerely, the passing of a time when, for all its difficulties, the life of the African *is* happy, in favour of one in which though a fuller happiness is intended, our own experience offers little immediate promise of its fulfilment. Can democracy rise to the occasion and create the happiness man needs? For my own part I believe sincerely that it can.

Politically, ethnologically, geographically and religiously such a journey must always be one of profound interest. It leaves me with another great storehouse of pictures, and it leaves me too with a great deal of food for thought. What is the riddle of this unbroken stretch of African bush which lies before me? What lies before all those little beehive villages on the red earth?

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Night falls and a misty moon diffuses a dim light over the mysterious, ghost-like, spirit ridden bush. Crickets chirp, tree-frogs and bats call to each other. In the distance there is an insistent throb of drums claiming that Africa never changes.

My mind goes back to a beautiful picture in a beautiful country on the banks of the Volta and the edge of the forest. It was also

night. The flames of a great bonfire leaped up into the dark. Sparks flew as new logs were thrown on. The boys and girls, and the teachers too, of a new-age African boarding school were giving a performance. Amongst the spectators were the chief and his court. He was dressed in a toga and had a golden wreath on his ebony brow. He had an umbrella carrier and a sceptre carrier. The umbrella was a gorgeous red and gold affair and the head of the sceptre had a golden replica of a stool and a chief. He looked like a Roman Emperor.

English and African items followed each other.

There was a play in which the cunning spider, who in West Africa takes the place of Abu Nuwas or the Rabbit of East Africa, appears as a farmer. He goes round to the neighbours to get them to help in his farming. First he goes to the termite who promises to come if the hen is not asked. Ananse, the spider, promises this but straightway goes and asks the hen, who promises her help if the hawk does not come. In the same way the hawk, the hunter, the snake, the stick, fire, water and the sun are asked, and on the appointed day appear and are put to work next to each other. This results in each killing the other until only the sun is left. Ananse is delighted with his practical joke. He brings the mason wasp, who is so surprised that he presses his waist so hard that it becomes no thicker than a thread. Then they go off to fetch a juju man who brings all the dead to life again.

This was pure Africa.

Next followed a play in which a murder was committed in the market place. The murderer is arrested by the native authority police and hailed before the chief and his court. In view of a good deal of hard swearing it is difficult to decide who is the real murderer. A fetish or medicine man, weirdly arrayed, is then brought in. He brings the victim to life and the resurrected corpse denounces his murderer.

This was Africa slightly diluted.

Then a Dance of the Wind—the wind started as a gentle breeze until it rose to a rushing wind in which the cloaks of the performers flew out behind them. Then it died away. Except for the rustle of the breeze and the rush of the wind the players had not made a sound.

“ THE OLD ORDER CHANGETH ”

“As for man, his days are as grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth: For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more.”

Though this was Africa too, it belonged to the world, for it was Art.

Now the flickering flames played on another scene. In the foreground lay a youth dying; behind him holding a spear stood Africa. A friend or two knelt round the dying Arthur, who raised himself on one elbow. With natural feeling and in moving tones, he spoke:

“The old order changeth, yielding place to new,  
And God fulfils Himself in many ways,  
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.”

From the dark in the background came the sad dirge in clear children's voices singing to a hymn tune:

“The old order changeth, yielding place to new” (*bis*).

Arthur continued:

“Comfort thyself: what comfort is in me?  
I have lived my life, and that which I have done  
May He within Himself make pure! but thou,  
If thou shouldst never see my face again,  
Pray for my soul.”

*Chorus*: “The old order changeth, yielding place to new” (*bis*).

*Arthur*: “More things are wrought by prayer  
Than this world dreams of. Therefore, let thy voice  
Rise like a fountain for me night and day,  
For what are men better than sheep or goats  
That nourish a blind life within the brain,  
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer  
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?”

*Chorus*: “The old order changeth, yielding place to new” (*bis*).

I LOOK AT THE MAP AGAIN

*Arthur:* "For so the whole round earth is every way  
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.  
But now farewell."

The waiting knights carried the dead Arthur away while again in the background came the sad insistent chorus:

"The old order changeth, yielding place to new."

Sad and deeply stirring as it was, was this just art or was it as real to the players as to me?



### *Appendix I*

## FURTHER HINTS TO INTENDING TRAVELLERS ACROSS THE SAHARA

*Car.* We had a 30-h.p. Ford V8, WOA2, and the engine was ideal for the purpose. Power is a necessity to get out of sand. The main trouble with this car was the low clearance, which was 7 inches when loaded, so that high clearance and high power are the two first requisites. Some of the travellers we met had four-wheel-drive lorries with a high clearance, and that is about the ideal vehicle. Two of these vehicles which we met did not get stuck in the sand at all. Low pressure tyres would certainly be a great advantage. We had 650 by 16 because no larger size could be fitted on to the chassis. In Arabia I had 900 by 16 on a Ford V8 saloon and that car could roar over sand dunes without any trouble at all.

The amount of petrol to be carried depends on three factors: first, the maximum consumption of the car in bottom gear; second, the longest known distance between any two refuelling points; and third, the provision of an adequate margin for real trouble in the sand. We worked on a consumption of 10 miles to the gallon and carried 47 gallons, 22 in the tanks and the remainder in jerricans, five of which were on the roof and one on one of the doors. It is better to carry a good deal of the petrol in jerricans on the principle of not having all your eggs in one basket. You cannot rely entirely on information in England or Algiers as to where petrol is available. In fact it had run out at Arak when we were there, and was on the verge of running out at Tamanrasset, where several travellers had to take aviation petrol, which, undiluted, is not particularly good for the car.

We estimated our oil requirements before leaving England and took winter and summer grades, but we had to get more. We were advised by the S.A.T.T. to drain out all our own oil before

using theirs. We changed the oil more often than is normally necessary because of the penetrating sand. Extra quantities of gear oil were hardly necessary. It is an extra insurance to grease the car every 500 miles. It is a very good thing to have a condenser fixed to the radiator. Ours kept the radiator filled up throughout the trip. We carried with us a litre of distilled water which we had obtained in Algiers, and we were surprised to find how frequently we had to top up the battery. In fact the bottle was empty when we got to Tamale.

The provision of spares is just anyone's guess. Some people told us that the weakness of our type of car was the back axle and advised us to take a spare. We tried without success to get one but we did take a spare front spring. Neither proved necessary because of really careful driving. If you drive really carefully and slowly and do not attempt to break records, there is no real reason why you should break anything. In the event we did not use any of our spares except for what was probably an unnecessary change of the petrol pump. The only thing that is absolutely essential is at least two spare tyres and inner tubes. We lost both our spares before beginning the difficult part of the journey. That taught us to check the tyre pressure every twenty kilometres or so, and I think it was due to adopting this over-cautious habit that we had no further trouble. Pressure rises extraordinarily rapidly. With our tyres we found the recommended pressure of 35 lb. per square inch about the best for hard roads, which is equivalent to  $2\frac{1}{2}$  kilos on a French manometer. We used 30 lb. and sometimes even less in sand, the equivalent of 2 kilos, so do not forget a pressure gauge. Ours got out of order several times and a wash in petrol did not always put it right immediately.

*Sand Equipment.* There are several alternatives to put under the wheels to drive out of a sand grave. Alfa mats, wire netting and rope mats nailed on to cross-pieces of wood are the least durable. Strong rope ladders would probably be good, but planks about a yard and a half long or opened up petrol drums are probably the simplest and best. Our planks were much too heavy. We had four of them, but jettisoned two before we started as they weighed 50 lb. apiece. The other two were shaved down in Algiers, but although they were still pretty heavy and strong one was broken to

## APPENDIX I

pieces before we had finished with the Sahara. A shovel is a useful thing for removing sand from under the back axle, but a couple of sand hoes, obtainable in Algiers, are far and away the best things for clearing sand from in front of the wheels. We had a steel towrope with us, and a kindly fellow traveller used it once to extricate us, but ordinarily speaking a towrope is not likely to be of much use except with parties. If we had really broken down it would have been the only way of getting the car away, if there had been something to tow it with.

Do not overload your car. Ours was guaranteed to carry 26 cwt. and we were told that in practice it could carry a great deal more, but 26 cwt. is what the car is intended to carry on good roads. An experienced desert garage manager told us our car ought not to have a load of more than 750 kilos (14½ cwts.) between Tamanrasset and In Gezzam, so we had our extra baggage carried on a S.A.T.T. lorry. We always had a good margin under 26 cwt., but it is a good thing to weigh your passengers and all you intend to carry before you start. It is quite extraordinary how weight mounts up with last-minute thoughts. Petrol weighs 7½ lb. a gallon and water 10 lb.

Do not forget to take puncture outfits with you as you cannot get them in the Saharan garages.

*Clothes.* Tropical clothes are necessary, and additional clothing coupons can be obtained from the Board of Trade.

*Food.* You can always get your meals at hotels and restaurants through France and in Algeria without coupons, though food is expensive and especially so in Algeria where it is scarce and meals depend largely on the black market. Butter, for instance, was 19s. a pound in Algiers, and milk is practically unobtainable anywhere.

The Ministry of Food granted us a permit to buy certain rationed foodstuffs for the journey and told us how to obtain an export permit to take it, and the unrationed food we had collected, out of the country. One of the most useful things they allowed us was 25 lbs. of lifeboat biscuits, and the permit also covered corned beef, condensed milk, tea, sugar, cheese, chocolate and soap. What would have been very useful would have been tins of fruit, but they were in short supply and we could not get a permit for them. Tinned fruit is included in the R.A.F. desert ration and is a most welcome and

## APPENDIX I

useful thing to have in the desert. We could not get a permit for tinned butter either, though what we saved from our English rations lasted remarkably well.

We were a party of seven and altogether we took 260 lbs. of food, of which very little remained at the end of the journey. You do not want to be involved in complicated cooking on such a journey and the most useful things we had were tins of soup, potatoes, M. and V., sausages, corned beef, cereals such as cornflakes, Bovril, fish pastes, cheese, chocolate, and of course tea, sugar and milk. Cornflakes were always a refreshing breakfast, but we rarely had the time to bother about making porridge. Dried fruit such as prunes are a good thing to have, but we are not particularly fond of them.

There is not much you can get on the way. You can buy bread at oases up to Ghardaia at least with coupons, and you can get *bons* sometimes for some things at most of the oases. A friend on the way strongly recommended having *pâte*, a kind of macaroni, as being invaluable for keeping tummies in order. Local food supplies, when indeed they are available, such as chickens and eggs, are a fantastic price, but you can buy oranges and lemons and dates at oases down to El Golca. Dates are a valuable food, but the quality in the Sahara is nowhere near that of Arabia.

*Water.* Up to five gallons a head as an emergency is recommended. We carried sixteen in jerricans, ten in a water tank and another six or seven in a *gerba* carried in front of the radiator, and we got along quite well with that. A *gerba* is a very useful article. It is a rather obscene looking water skin made out of the entire skin of a goat, and provided it has been well used it keeps water very cool and refreshing. A new one makes the water taste abominable. It is a common feature of desert travel in Arabia and the Sahara and will have to be bought locally. The water is kept cool by evaporation, so its contents are always a diminishing asset. The quality of water throughout the Sahara varies considerably. Beware of drinking too much at In Salali where a high percentage of magnesia makes it quite unnecessary to think about Epsom Salts. We were advised to take with us a bottle of medicinal charcoal to counteract its effects, and a number of our party suffered from tummies.

Always boil the water before you drink it. I have always found

## APPENDIX I

that there is no drink better than tea in the desert. Made fairly strong and with plenty of sugar and milk it provides both stimulant and sustenance, and there is nothing better for alleviating thirst, except of course long draughts of really cold water, which however have not the same value. Avoid drinking in between morning, midday and evening halts. It only makes you thirstier and the discipline is not difficult to acquire. In all my desert experience I always found that undisciplined beduins have a far worse time with thirst than I have. Drink plenty of tea and water, particularly in the evening, because the body loses a great deal of moisture.

*Medicines.* The obvious things are the most necessary. Aspirin, quinine or one of the substitutes for it such as Mepacrine or Paludrine, castor oil, salts and fruit salts, cascara, cough mixture, M. and B. 760 tablets for internal and external use, iodine, boracic and zinc ointments, good eye drops (both Argyrol and Optrex can be recommended), an eye bath, hydrogen peroxide, elastoplast, boric powder, lint, cottonwool, oil silk, gauze and bandages.

This is not of course an exhaustive list and individuals may need special things of their own such as stomach powder, but they are all things that my family and I have found useful in deserts. Actually there is no malaria in the desert and I never saw a mosquito, but if you are going on into tropical Africa you certainly need quinine or a substitute and should take a preliminary course in the desert before starting its prophylactic use in French West Africa.

*Bedding.* What you take is of course a matter of taste and space. I hate sleeping on anything but the sand and for this two blankets is an irreducible minimum. A pillow if you can find room for it is a comfort, but rolled-up coats or a small despatch case serve me equally well. It is extremely cold in the desert at night and any extra clothes you can pile on are a good thing. You would not be overwarm with four blankets. A most comforting thing to have is a light Arab shawl which is not only warm but provides sufficient ventilation. This you put over your head and it keeps out a certain proportion of sand and insects.

*Inoculations.* Inoculation for yellow fever should be carried out before leaving England, and vaccination and TAB inoculation may be desirable.

## APPENDIX I

*Money.* A bank will be able to give advice on existing currency regulations. Whatever you do be sure to take money with a good margin for unforeseen contingencies. It is about the only thing that will get you out of major difficulties such as accidents and provision of food if you run short. Hotels are really expensive and information about them in England is inaccurate. The actual expenses of our journey amounted to £424, fares and all, and we were extremely economical. It is a most uncomfortable feeling to be short of money, and I would recommend anybody if they are in doubt to take the full amount they are allowed. You can always remit your savings back. The Sahara crossing is not cheap. Petrol rises to 10s. 6d. a gallon at Tamaurasset.

*Rates of Exchange.* When we made our journey the rate of exchange of French and Algerian francs was 480 to £1 sterling. French West African francs were 282 to the £1. You can get a limited number of francs in England and Algerian francs can be got in Algiers at the Banque d'Algérie only. It may be possible to get French West African francs there too, but after leaving Algiers the next bank is at Zinder in the Niger Colony.

*Documents.* Do not fail to consult the Passport Office and the French Visa Office some weeks before leaving England. You must have a special visa to cross French West Africa and this is obtained by personal application to the Governor General. You should take your application to the French Visa Office in good time to get an answer back. Of course for those who are going beyond French territory other visas may be necessary, but the Passport Office will be able to advise about this.

The A.A. or the R.A.C. should certainly be consulted about car documents, and you are advised to have twelve copies of an inventory of all the principal articles in your car for customs purposes. You may not be required to produce it, but always co-operate with the Customs. Don't attempt to 'do' them and they will always treat you generously.

A Form 29B, which is obtainable from the Customs, is necessary to take the car out of the country, and for those who intend to bring their cars back a stamped duplicate is required.

Call on the British Consul in Algiers. He is full of good advice

## APPENDIX I

and takes the greatest interest in travellers. Call also on the *Commandants* at each of the desert posts. They signal your departure to the next station and are kindness itself.

*Luggage.* Send on your heavy luggage in advance. You will be well advised to see it off yourself before you leave England and it may take a very long time to get to its destination.

*Insurance.* It is a good thing to insure what you can but motor insurance companies do not appear to quote any comprehensive rate for journeys across the Sahara. All you can get is an insurance against third party risks and marine insurance crossing the Channel and Mediterranean. Make sure you are insured against accidents to the car whilst being loaded and unloaded.

*Passages.* Book your passages across the Channel and the Mediterranean well in advance so as to be able to leave Algiers some days in advance of a S.A.T.T. convoy.

Above all, be courteous and polite to everyone you meet, French, Arab or African. They are three of the most kindly and hospitable races on earth and any British traveller is ashamed when he hears, as he occasionally does, of British rudeness. It is very useful to be able to speak some French and an attempt to do so is always appreciated. Arabic is also a useful language. Don't think you make yourself understood in English by shouting. Remember that those who have to do with travel in the Sahara, such as the S.A.T.T. and Trans-Saharien are as an efficient and courteous body of men as you will find anywhere. Any advice they give you, therefore, is well worth listening to, because they have forgotten far more about the game than you will ever learn.

Finally, let me recommend you most earnestly to buy *Hints to Travellers* in two volumes published by the Royal Geographical Society. Not only will you find invaluable advice about cars in the desert, but indispensable information on every subject an experienced or inexperienced traveller will need on such a journey. I admit that this blurb sounds as if I had a financial interest in the book, but I certainly have not. I only say what I do because I have never failed to find useful and quite indispensable information in it.\*

\* Vol. I, 16/- net; Vol. II, 14/- net (John Murray).

## Appendix II

### TABLE OF DISTANCES BY LAND AND BY WATER FROM ASH TO ACCRA

<i>From</i>	<i>To</i>	<i>Land</i>	<i>Pro- gressive Mileage</i>	<i>Water</i>	<i>Total Distance</i>
Uphousden . . .	Ash . . .	3	3	—	3
Ash . . .	Dover . . .	14	17	—	17
Dover . . .	Calais . . .	—	—	22	39
Calais . . .	Paris . . .	179	196	—	218
Paris . . .	Marseilles . . .	504	700	—	722
Marseilles . . .	Algiers . . .	—	—	402	1124
Algiers . . .	Laghuat . . .	274	974	—	1398
Laghuat . . .	Ghardaia . . .	127	1101	—	1525
Ghardaia . . .	El Golca . . .	196	1297	—	1721
El Golca . . .	In Salah . . .	271	1568	—	1992
In Salah . . .	Arak . . .	185	1753	—	2177
Arak . . .	Tamanrasset . . .	250	2003	—	2427
Tamanrasset . . .	In Gezzam . . .	252	2255	—	2679
In Gezzam . . .	In Abangarit . . .	126	2381	—	2805
In Abangarit . . .	Agades . . .	177	2558	—	2982
Agades . . .	Zinder . . .	283	2841	—	3265
Zinder . . .	Tessaua . . .	73	2914	—	3338
Tessaua . . .	Maradi . . .	82	2996	—	3420
Maradi . . .	Madana . . .	102	3098	—	3522
Madana . . .	Birni n Koni . . .	56	3154	—	3578
Birni n Koni . . .	Dogo n Dutchi . . .	93	3247	—	3671
Dogo n Dutchi . . .	Dosso . . .	87	3334	—	3758
Dosso . . .	Niamcy . . .	87	3421	—	3845
Niamcy . . .	Niger ferry ( $\frac{1}{2}$ mile). . .	—	—	1	3846



# APPENDIX II

<i>From</i>	<i>To</i>	<i>Pro- gressive</i>		<i>Water</i>	<i>Total Distance</i>
		<i>Land</i>	<i>Mileage</i>		
Niger ferry .	Fada n Gurma .	186	3607	—	4032
Fada n Gurma .	Wagadugu .	147	3754	—	4179
Wagadugu .	Anglo-French frontier .	105	3859	—	4284
Anglo-French frontier .	Tamale .	131	3990	—	4415
Tamale .	Kumasi .	237	4227	—	4652
Kumasi .	Accra .	183	4410	—	4835
TOTALS .		4410	4410	425	4835